

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Bhakti Yoga Book 4

IN THE PRESENCE OF BHAKTI

*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century*

Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati
Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Nivaran

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*Including answers from the satsangs of
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



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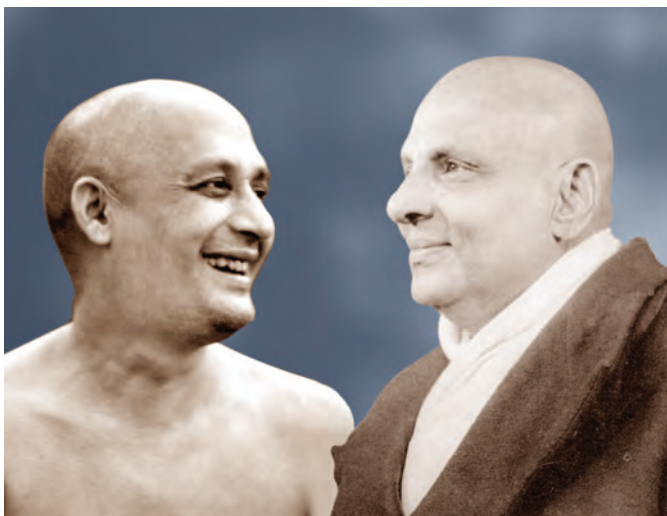
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga
and to our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

Swami Niranjana

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Preface

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Conversations on the Science of Yoga is an encyclopaedic series which brings together the collected teachings of two generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Munger. Satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati on his numerous national and international tours also provide the answers to many questions on this vast subject. These luminaries represent a living tradition in which the eternal knowledge and wisdom of yoga vidya has been passed from guru to disciple in a dynamic continuum from the early twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The series consists of sets of books which present the vast, timeless culture of yoga topic by topic, in question and answer format. In this way, complex and profound subjects such as karma yoga, hatha yoga and bhakti yoga, are presented in clear, simple language. These conversations on yoga reflect an ancient and enduring approach to the transmission of wisdom, in which spiritual aspirants seek answers to their questions at the feet of the guru.

Many of the answers also include verses from the various relevant scriptures, connecting the modern experience with the classical tradition. It is through the lives and teachings of the masters that the scriptures are correctly and intuitively

interpreted for each generation, ensuring that the light of these revelations continues to illumine and inspire the hearts and minds of all who aspire for spiritual upliftment.

Conversations on the Science of Yoga has been compiled from the rich archive of satsangs and writings, both published and unpublished, which is held at the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger. The organization of this material into the major branches of yoga and related topics creates a unique interpretation of the classical yogic sciences for the benefit of humanity in the modern era. Deeply founded in tradition, the teachings are both systematic and practical, addressing the needs of individuals and society at a time when adjustment to constant change is placing unprecedented pressure on people all over the world.

The Bihar Yoga tradition

Bihar School of Yoga is ideally placed to produce this major contribution to yogic literature. Founded in 1963 by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, the system known in India as Bihar Yoga and internationally as Satyananda Yoga, seamlessly integrates all facets of the yogic tradition, including the various branches of yoga, the philosophies which are fundamental to the yogic culture and the dynamism of

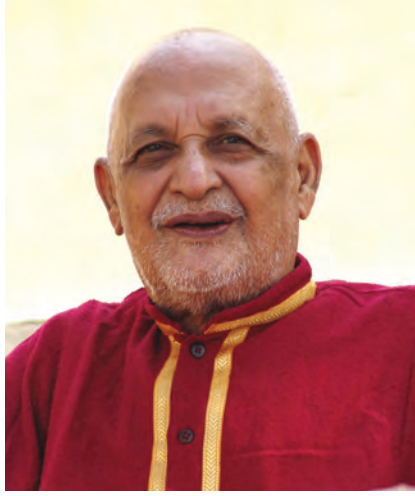


self-realized preceptors which ensures that the yoga vidya remains fresh and relevant in any age. This all-inclusive approach means that yogic practices are available as tools for holistic life management, while other *vidyas*, spiritual sciences, such as Tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya provide a broad philosophical base. Emerging from this living tradition, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga* is a unique and precious offering to humanity.



Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963)

Swami Sivananda was a towering spiritual force in the yogic renaissance which developed in India in the first half of the twentieth century. After serving as a doctor in Malaya, he returned to India to pursue his spiritual aspirations, and in 1924 was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in Rishikesh. He founded the Divine Life Society, toured India extensively, wrote hundreds of books and inspired thousands around the world to practise yoga and lead a divine life. Swami Sivananda's eightfold path of yoga – serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize – expresses his philosophy of service to humanity and continues to guide the work of the Bihar School of Yoga.



Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923–2009)

Swami Satyananda was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa by his guru Swami Sivananda, in 1947. After serving his guru's mission in Rishikesh for twelve years, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. From that base he took the teachings to the rest of the world, fulfilling the mandate of his guru to 'spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore.'

Through his genius and compassion, many ancient, complex and esoteric practices were systematized, simplified and made available to people of all ages, cultures and creeds. Swami Satyananda's blend of charisma and pragmatism attracted multitudes of devotees wherever he went, giving rise to a global movement and creating a far-reaching network of ashrams, yoga centres and teachers. Meanwhile, the headquarters in Bihar continued to expand its many programs, including the publishing division, producing numerous books that both preserve and disseminate the incredibly rich seam of practical wisdom which flows through this lineage.

In 1988 Swami Satyananda renounced his mission in order to live as a paramahansa sannyasin, performing higher

spiritual and vedic sadhanas in an isolated location. During this chapter of his life, he also realized his guru's teaching of 'serve, love, give', by establishing Sivananda Math, an organization dedicated to raising the living standards of the weaker and underprivileged sectors of society.

At midnight on 5 December 2009, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati attained mahasamadhi.



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati (1960)

A yogi from earliest childhood, Swami Niranjanananda joined the Bihar School of Yoga in 1964 and was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in 1971. At the age of eleven he was sent to live abroad by his guru Swami Satyananda, giving him direct experience and understanding of people from a vast array of cultures and walks of life. These years instilled in him a rare, cross-cultural insight into human nature, enabling him to communicate and interact with the international community with familiarity, ease and humour.

Combined with his depth of spiritual and yogic knowledge, this background equipped Swami Niranjanananda to guide the Bihar School of Yoga and the international yoga movement from 1983 until 2008, when he began handing

over the administration to the next generation. During this time he also authored many classic books on yoga, tantra and the upanishads and founded Bihar Yoga Bharati, the world's first yoga university, while continuing extensive national and international touring.

In 2010, Swami Niranjan established Sannyasa Peeth to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom of yoga vidya.



Yoga is not a philosophy, it is a practical science. Philosophy gives you knowledge, yoga gives you experience. This is the beauty of yoga. That experience is a manifestation of your inner being.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Introduction

The discovery of the ninefold steps, limbs or stages of bhakti yoga, continues in *Bhakti Yoga Book 4: In the Presence of Bhakti*. These *navangas*, are an ongoing process of fine-tuning, refining and purifying human emotions and their expression. There is, however, not one single set or collection of nine steps, as for instance in raja yoga, which has one well-defined system of eight limbs, *ashtanga*, established by Sage Patanjali. This should not confuse the aspirant. On the contrary, the variety of navangas is entirely in tune with the spirit of bhakti and bhakti yoga.

Matters of the heart cannot be confined and restricted to one system only, to one approach and no other. The relationship between the Divine and the individual is as unique as each journey to live and fulfil this relationship. Therefore, the search for bhakti should be undertaken with the heart wide open to the varied experiences of those who have opened their hearts to share their own experience of bhakti. It has been said that the first step, the foundation of bhakti yoga, has to be the right supportive environment, *satsang*. The aspirant has to choose well, be responsible for and committed to these choices.

The foundation of one's inner environment and commitment to enhancing the quality of one's nature, is constant remembrance, *smaran* or *smaranam*. It is the backbone of bhakti yoga sadhana. Without making the effort to

remember, there is no bhakti yoga. The tool of remembrance is *japa*, the repetition of mantra. The object of remembrance can be one's sankalpa, one's goal, or the object of worship, *ishta devata*. The aim of remembrance is the experience of closeness, proximity and oneness.

In the lives of bhaktas, the power of mantra has been put to the test time and again. In times of adversity, it is the mantra which invokes help. In the daily life of bhaktas, mantra repetition has helped them to stay connected with their true goal and remain disconnected from worldly, mundane involvement. It is a silent, intimate practice – the bhakta's lifeline. Japa can be practised according to strict rules of anushtana regarding lifestyle or number of repetitions. It can be practised spontaneously along with any day-to-day activity. It can be practised with every breath, or 21,600 times a day, this being the ultimate achievement of remembrance. The poet-saint Kabirdas confirmed:

I declare to the loud beat of a drum
That with every breath that passes
Without remembering the name of the Lord,
Thou art losing the chance to conquer the three worlds,
The chance to reach those spiritual heights.

Constant refinement

With the integration of japa as a means of remembrance, the bhakta aspirant has crossed the halfway mark. The remaining four limbs of bhakti yoga continue to refine one's nature, understanding and interaction in the world. The presence of a transcendental, higher reality or God in one's own life and in creation at large is felt more often, more strongly and with an overwhelming feeling of gratitude.

This gratitude is expressed by wanting to be a worthy seeker, and living in an appropriate manner to invite this presence into one's life. The bhakta's effort consists of fine-tuning and purifying thought, word and action. Blemishes of negativity are removed to allow the light to shine. The result

is balance in all situations, acceptance of one's place, duties and responsibilities in life, and expansion of awareness.

The individual no longer lives in isolation but experiences connection, connectivity with creation and ultimately with the creator. The feeling of *atmabhava*, seeing divinity in everything, is one of the limbs of bhakti yoga. For Swami Satyanada, it is the highest attainment of human life. The feeling that the same divine spark is alive in every form of creation opens the human heart to hitherto unknown dimensions of love. The idea of 'I' and 'mine' ceases to dominate one's existence. It is replaced by an all-embracing compassion for humanity and its world.

The fruit of feeling this oneness is a deep, unshakeable sense of contentment. Nothing can disturb one anymore; everything is right and as it should be. Discontentment is the source of many ills, the cause of much agitation at the level of the individual and the community. Contentment is not lethargy or avoiding one's responsibility. It is a state where the following prayer has become a reality in one's life:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

The understanding of what one can and cannot do and the wholehearted acceptance of it leads to contentment. Developing contentment is a practice, a discipline and sadhana of bhakti yoga which requires constant vigilance and the willingness to reach the goal. It is far from being a state of passive acceptance of a status quo. It is sincere commitment to improve one's being and help others to improve theirs.

Now, Your will

For the bhakta aspirant there is only one thing left to do and that is to do nothing. Once the flute is hollowed by constant striving, nothing remains to be done but let the tune be played. Swami Niranjanananda describes surrender,

atmanivedana, with the following words: “The stage where one is able to contact a higher reality at any time is called surrender.”

Atmanivedana is not only an experience, but a limb of bhakti yoga. To leave everything in the hands of the Divine; to listen to, feel and follow the will of the Divine; and to open the little self to the flow of the Divine is the last leg of the bhakta’s journey.

Swami Satyananda said, “The art of surrender is a virtue by itself.” It has to be learnt, acquired and then fully lived with every fibre of one’s being. Ultimately, bhakti, this indescribable state of bliss, can only be reached once surrender is complete. It will remain unattainable and access will be denied as long as any traces of self, ego or identity are left. Bhaktas know.

In Books 3 and 4 of *Bhakti Yoga*, the various disciplines prescribed for a bhakti yoga aspirant have been discussed. The beginning and the final destination of the journey are clear: satsang, having a positive association and environment, and atmanivedan, surrender to a higher reality, God or the Divine. The roads which connect the start with the goal need to be chosen and travelled according to individual inclination or aptitude. There are no further rules regarding any defined sequence. What matters is the solid foundation of satsang and a constant awareness of the destination.

Each discipline helps bhakti yoga travellers to come closer and closer to their goal by making them more positive, pure, open, loving and sattwic. They may choose to perfect one discipline and be fully engrossed in the practice, or practise several disciplines simultaneously. Each discipline is but another angle of the same process of purifying one’s nature and humbly accepting one’s karma and dharma in life. The process of fine-tuning the gross, self-centred personality and making one’s entire being subtle, loving and all-embracing is the base and purpose of every discipline and practice.

Positive qualities, seva, humility and innocence, sanyam, atmabhava, smaranan and santosha are steps along this process. They may seem distinct, yet they are part of a whole, inseparable and deeply connected. Distinctions are made by the head, not by the heart, and names are given by the head, not by the heart. Emotional management, transcending basic emotions and giving them a higher, sublime and divine quality for the welfare of all, is the outcome of each step, each anga, and the aim of bhakti yoga.

In bhakti yoga the aspirant has been given instructions and guidelines that are clear, practical and applicable. What is necessary is to take the first step and integrate bhakti yoga into one's everyday life. Once the emotions are transformed, the nature and personality of the aspirant change, and also the interactions with the world and the connection to Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram – truth, goodness, beauty. With this understanding, the bhakti yoga aspirant embarks on a sadhana of 'Joy and Discipline'.



1

Remembrance – Feeling the Divine Presence

Wherever there is vibration and movement, there is bound to be a frequency and, therefore, sound. Mantras represent that vibration, that frequency, that sound. The fifth form of bhakti yoga is using mantras to go deep inside one's mind and consciousness, without any identification with the intellectual mind or the inner experience, and remaining connected with faith.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

WHAT ARE MANTRAS?

How can mantras be defined?

Swami Satyananda: Mantras are not the names of gods and goddesses. They are sounds, words, vibrations put into a particular pattern, and they are more subtle than the actual physical waves, more subtle than any kind of wave known to science today. Mantra has no limitations; the mind is the basis of mantra and the mantra can be launched through the mind. The supreme mantra is *Aum*; it is the primal mantra, the first seed of creation.

What is the role of mantra?

Swami Niranjanananda: Mantra opens the doors of the heart for it connects one with one's inner nature, *ishta*, the spirit with which one identifies, residing in the heart. Once the connection with *ishta* takes place, then love swells. That love is not selfish, not self-oriented, but it gives others happiness and pleasure. Therefore, *bhakti* is not devotion, rather it is generation, cultivation or flowering of love which is selfless and which connects one with other humans and, through them, with the transcendental divine nature, God.

How is the mantra revealed?

Swami Satyananda: In the human conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind, there are many images, forces, ideas and impressions. In the subconscious and unconscious mind these take the form of symbols. In dreams, in meditation and in general behaviour the subconscious mind is expressed through symbols. This has been discussed by modern psychology in great detail.

In dreams, what is usually seen and heard is said to be symbols of the subconscious. There are also symbols of the unconscious but they are not revealed to everyone. Mantras are only revealed to a very few pure souls, who are able to hear the sound or the word of the unconscious. That word is mantra.

Mantra is revealed in a deep psychic state, where the individual is completely lost to himself and to his worldly experiences, and when nothing but the inner light shines in front of him. Those sounds are called mantras, which he hears when he is aware inwardly at that time, or maybe a little before that. It is in this sense that it is always said that the Vedas, Bible and Koran are the word of God – they are not written by man.

How is mantra related to the Sanskrit language?

Swami Satyananda: Mantras are a combination of many sound waves. Each one of the Sanskrit letters has only

one phonetic sound. These letters generate sound waves. When articulation is necessary, one of the sixteen vowels is added to the letter. No other language has such a scientific sound arrangement except the Sanskrit language, which is supposedly the oldest language in the world.

Mantras are not to be regarded as words formulating sentences. There is a systematic arrangement in order to suit the purpose. The ancient inventors of Sanskrit had a complete knowledge of the sound waves and they converted them into a particular mode of articulation to create certain vibrations.

In Sanskrit, the letters of mantras are known as *akshara*, 'that which is imperishable'. Science has now proved that sound waves are never extinguished, as the vibrations are ever present in the atmosphere. The groups of letters are known as *varna*, which means that they have a colour. Sound waves also have a colour. Once a word is pronounced, it becomes immortal. Every word creates a form which is imperishable and which has colour.

Is it important to know the meaning of mantras?

Swami Niranjanananda: Mantra represents the divine, cosmic force, the transformative, superhuman force. Words always convey a meaning. Sounds always convey a meaning; they have a particular pitch, frequency and vibration. This pitch, frequency and vibration are understood by the human mind, not only intellectually but also psychically.

Human beings have made the mistake of trying to rationalize everything through the intellect. That is the greatest mistake a human being can make. Intellect is only one component of the mind. There are many components and attributes of the mind which receive, filter and process the information received by an individual in the form of words, in the form of vibrations, in the form of the existing environment. Therefore, the point that needs to be emphasized is that mantras are powerful transformative agents.

What are the two categories of mantra?

Swami Satyananda: Mantras belong to two categories, commonly known as sakama and nishkama. When repeated without self-interest, it is *nishkama japa*, which forms a part of shuddha bhakti. *Sakama japa* is repetition of a mantra to achieve a particular end, for instance, to win a lawsuit or to ward off an obstinate illness.

What is the purpose of mantra?

Swami Niranjanananda: The purpose of mantra is to liberate the mental dimension from its self-created bondage. This is the definition of the word mantra. Mantra is the force that can liberate the mind from the forces of illusion and ignorance and raise the level of the mind to experience its real nature. In this context, mantras are associated with the realization of manomaya kosha. They are not just sounds or words of power associated with deities. Mantras have many meanings: some are yogic mantras, some are universal mantras, some are religious mantras. People have created these associations with a particular person, concept or belief, however, the mantras existed before any association was created.

How does mantra create change within?

Swami Satyananda: Mantra is not a holy word or part of a hymn. Mantra is not sacred, nor is it a tool for concentration. Mantra is a vehicle for expansion of mind and liberation of energy.

The sounds that one receives and the sounds one makes create resonant waves in the depths and surface of the mind. The sound waves have various forms known as mandalas which go deep and hit the depths of the mind. A pebble thrown into a pool generates circles, waves or ripples. Deep freeze the whole pool immediately and then look at it; follow the ripples and find the point where the pebble hit the water. The process of mantra is similar.

Mantra is a purifying force. Nothing in the world can pollute or make the mantra impure. Mantra can purify all corruption. It is such a great purifier that no matter what

one eats, how one lives, what one thinks, or which religion one belongs to, it will dominate and destroy all samskaras. When the samskaras are destroyed and the veil is split asunder, one will see the divinity shining before one like the sun. What one has been searching for is not far away. There is only a veil between you and me, which has to be destroyed by mantra shakti, mantra yoga. *Om* is the most powerful, the most benign of all the mantras.

What are the three methods of mantra sadhana?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are three ways of practising mantra. The best way is *manasika*, or mental repetition. It creates the *tadakara vritti*, the tendency of the mind to become one with whatever is presented to it. If, while doing this practice, the mind becomes introverted to the point of sleepiness, one should begin to whisper the mantra to once again link the awareness to it. If one is still drowsy, one should begin to say the mantra aloud. These are the three ways of mantra japa: *manasika*, saying it mentally; *upanshu*, whispering it; and *vaikhari*, saying it aloud.

How is a mantra chosen?

Swami Satyananda: In order to realize the sound in one's own self, one has to discover one's mind for oneself. This sound is called mantra. According to tantra, mantras are of two types. One type of mantra is based on personal faith. A Christian will have faith in Christianity, and will repeat the name of Christ or Mary. A Hindu will repeat the name of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Govinda, Shiva and others. This is called the sound according to one's personal faith. This particular division is known as *bhakti marga*, the path of devotion.

There is another branch of mantra which is not based on faith, but on personality. For example, each person is born under certain planetary conditions. Not everybody is born at the same time. Each person is born at different planetary conjunctions, so each one has a different personality, a different destiny and character.

What are the rules regarding mantra and ishta devata?

Swami Satyananda: If mantra is practised only for spiritual attainment, there are certain rules. However, if one practises with a particular end in view, there are different rules. Each ishta mantra has a corresponding devata and yantra, and one has to proceed accordingly. If one is practising the mantra for spiritual evolution and the development of inner awareness, the mantra and the ishta devata do not have to correspond.

In practices for spiritual attainment, emotions come into the picture. An aspirant can have a strong feeling for Sri Rama, his lifestyle and divinity, but the mantra is the Shiva mantra, not the Rama mantra. The mantra does not correspond to the ishta devata. It does not matter since I am not doing it for any particular purpose, but for the purification of inner awareness, to have a vision of the Divine. The aspirant has to decide whether he wishes to practise for spiritual or worldly attainment.

How does mantra sadhana relate to bhakti yoga and the development of faith?

Swami Niranjanananda: One stage of bhakti yoga sadhana is mantra sadhana. Mantras are sound vibrations. The effect of mantra sadhana is to connect one with the inner source of strength, which leads to the development of faith. Mantra sadhana can be in any convenient form: meditation, mantra japa, chanting, kirtan, bhajans. Whether sitting, walking or sleeping, the mantra sadhana continues inside.

Each mantra has a particular frequency and resonance which influences a psychic centre or *chakra*. Chanting a mantra mentally, such as *Om Namah Shivaya*, creates a vibration, a wave pattern in manomaya kosha. Thoughts are also creating wave patterns in manomaya kosha. Thoughts are like the little waves that continuously lap at the shore. Tsunamis, big waves, are the emotions. When one is trembling with fear, when one is depressed and nothing seems to be going right, that is a tsunami mind, something

which is totally overpowering and one cannot free oneself from its effect. Mantra helps to pacify the mind, to manage these little waves and tsunamis.

Mantra chanting leads to the development of faith as one connects with the source of inner strength. That faith is based on the experience of the power within, not some abstract understanding, yet something one has experienced, which is divine, transformative and transcendental. Faith here symbolizes the connection with the source of energy which is uplifting, inspiring and vitalizing, and which fuses the entire personality by changing the pranas.

Awakened prana brings bliss to the body and mind. According to tantra, the pranas awaken at the time of sex and at the time of samadhi. At that time union is intensified, the inner feeling of oneness is experienced, which is the activation of prana. Kirtan activates the pranas and takes one into an altered state of mind.

What is meant by psychic background?

Swami Satyananda: When japa is practised, there are two approaches. One is the devotional approach of a bhakta or devotee, who just does the practice thinking that he is remembering God's name and that God will fulfil his wishes, or that it is his duty to remember God's name.

The second approach is that of the yogi, who may or may not have much faith in God, but knows that by doing japa the consciousness becomes subtler and subtler, and ultimately it loses touch with normal consciousness and becomes introverted. That is the psychic approach to japa.

What are the two results of mantra practice?

Swami Satyananda: Once the mantra manifests, its realization can be had in the form of mantra siddhi and by realizing the presiding deity of that mantra. The presiding deity of the mantra *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya* is Sri Krishna. Shiva is the presiding deity of *Om Namah Shivaya*. The practitioner either obtains mantra siddhi or realizes the presiding deity of

the mantra. If the mantra *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya* is practised according to the rules prescribed in the scriptures, one will either have direct realization of Sri Krishna or acquire mantra siddhi. These are the two results of any mantra.

How are mantras related to divine qualities?

Swami Sivananda: Mantra yoga is an exact science. *Mananat trayate iti mantrah – manana*, constant thinking or recollection, through which one is released from the round of births and deaths is mantra. Every mantra has a rishi, who gave it to the world, a *chanda* or metre, a devata, the *bija* or seed, which gives it a special power or *shakti*, and the *kilakam* or the nail which is pinning the mantra inside the sadhaka. A mantra is divinity. Mantra and its presiding devata are one. The mantra itself is devata. Mantra is divine power, *daivi shakti*, manifesting in a sound body. Constant repetition of a mantra with faith, devotion and purity augments the shakti or power of the aspirant, purifies and awakens the mantra chaitanya latent in the mantra and bestows on the sadhaka mantra siddhi, illumination, freedom, peace, eternal bliss, immortality.

By constant repetition of the mantra the sadhaka imbibes the virtues and power of the deity that presides over the mantra. Repetition of *Surya mantra* bestows health, long life, vigour, vitality, *tejas* or brilliance. It removes diseases of the body and of the eye. No enemy can do any harm. Repetition of *Aditya Hridayam* in the early morning is highly beneficial. Sri Rama conquered Ravana through the repetition of *Aditya Hridayam* imparted by Rishi Agastya.

Mantras are in the form of praise and appeal to the deities for help and mercy. Some mantras control and command evil spirits. Rhythmical vibrations of sound give rise to forms. Recitation of mantras gives rise to the formation of the particular figure of the deity. Repetition of the Saraswati mantra *Om Sarasvatyai Namah* bestows wisdom and good intelligence. One will have inspiration

and compose poems. Repetition of *Om Sri Mahalakshmyai Namah* confers wealth and removes poverty. Ganesha mantra removes any obstacle in any undertaking. *Mahamrityunjaya mantra* prevents accidents, incurable diseases and bestows long life and immortality. It is a moksha mantra too.

Repetition of Subramanya mantra *Om Saravanabhavaya Namah* gives success in any undertaking and makes one glorious. It drives off the evil influences and evil spirits. Repetition of Sri Hanuman mantra *Om Hanumanthaya Namah* bestows victory and strength. Repetition of *Panchakshara* and *Shodashakshara* (Sri Vidya) give whatever one wants. One must learn this vidya from a guru.

Repetition of Gayatri or Pranava, *Om Namah Shivaya*, *Om Namō Narayanaya*, *Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya*, one and a quarter lakh (125,000) times with bhava, faith and devotion confers mantra siddhi. *Om*, *Soham*, *Shivoham*, *Aham Brahmasmi* are moksha mantras. They will help to attain self-realization. *Om Sri Ramaya Namah*, *Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya* are saguna mantras which enable one to attain saguna realization first and then nirguna realization in the end.

PURPOSE OF MANTRA IN BHAKTI YOGA

How can mantra be practised and what benefits will it give?

Swami Sivananda: A mantra is divinity. Japa is the repetition of the mantra or the names of the Divine. In Kali Yuga, the practice of japa alone can give eternal peace, bliss and immortality. Japa ultimately results in *samadhi* or communion with the Divine. Sankirtan is the singing of God's names with faith and devotion. When one sings His names, one feels that Hari or one's ishta devata is seated in one's heart, that every name of the Divine is filled with divine potencies, that the old vicious samskaras and vasanas are burnt by the power of the name and that the mind is filled with sattwa or purity, that rajas and tamas are completely destroyed, and that the veil of ignorance is torn down. This kind of mental attitude brings the maximum benefit of sankirtan. It is not the

number of japa or the length of time of kirtan that counts for spiritual growth but it is the intensity of bhava with which God's names are sung.

Is it necessary to have feelings when practising mantra?

Swami Niranjanananda: How can one even think of practising mantra without bhava, without the quality of feeling? To think of any action or thought without emotion is hypocritical. When one is angry or feels frightened, is it without bhava? When one is under stress, is it without bhava? Any mental state, whether it is hatred, jealousy, frustration, anxiety, stress or passion, cannot exist without bhava, the associated feeling.

There has to be passion in mantra. In the beginning of mantra practice, the mantra is repeated mechanically as one does not know how to connect with the bhava. However, when one knows how, then by combining the mantra with the bhava, the energy of the mantra intensifies.

That potency has the capacity to invoke God in a physical form in front of the bhakta, which means it can change any rule in creation. Mantra performed with bhava has the potential and capacity to make God take a physical body and appear. Mantra is so powerful that it has the capacity to command God to give darshan. Even God is subject to the power of the mantra. It is not the human mind that makes Him or Her appear. It is this declaration of God in the form of mantra, and God is bound by that declaration. Therefore, if God can accept the supremacy of the mantra, cannot the power of mantra change every kind of natural law? Those who have practised mantra with bhava have been able to perfect this quality and realize the full potency of the mantra.

Mantra will become fruitful only when bhava is associated with it. Just as a feeling is associated with a state of anger, jealousy, stress and tension, or with what one eats and drinks, or with a friend or enemy, similarly, a feeling is associated with a mantra. How then is it possible to keep the practice of mantra separate from the feeling associated with the mantra?

It is not logical. Therefore, whenever one practises a mantra as part of mantra sadhana, or sings kirtan, one should also try to project the emotion associated with the mantra into it. Then when one chants or sings the mantra one is able to channel the emotions with full control, and that is quite an achievement for any human being.

Normally logic follows a predetermined path and emotion follows a different path. Many times emotions cloud logic, and many times logic can suppress an emotion. However, when they complement each other, logic becomes an experience and emotion becomes an insight which gives wisdom. Therefore, one should try to feel the emotion of the mantra when repeating it. That is the real practice of mantra.

Mechanical repetition occurs in the first stage of mantra practice to stop the natural dissipation of the mind. Once the dissipation stops, then to awaken the state of consciousness and to experience the transformed condition inherent in the mantra, the bhava, the emotion, has to be added. Mechanical repetition of mantra is recommended in the first stage to create a pattern of mind and develop an awareness of the mantra for longer periods of time. When one is able to do that, then, in the second stage, the component of emotion should be added to the mantra and the result will be beneficial and uplifting.

When a bhakta is devoted to a particular god or goddess may he use the name of the deity as a mantra?

Swami Satyananda: People who are devoted to different forms of gods and goddesses use their names as mantras. They have faith in a great power and develop love and attachment for a particular deity, like Shiva or Kali, who represent that force.

Why are mantras and yantras part of bhakti yoga sadhana?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the Indian tradition, the use of mantra and yantra are synonymous with bhakti yoga sadhana, as they channel and purify the emotions and create

a state of mind in which the aspirant can connect with the object of worship, the *ishta*.

Bhakti is a state of mind. There are various states of mind such as jealousy, hatred, love, compassion, greed, arrogance. Similarly, bhakti is also a state of mind. The other states of mind connect one to the material world, whereas bhakti connects one with one's object of inner identification.

The scriptures have defined bhakti in many ways. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna describes bhakti as a process of positive and qualitative transformation of one's mental, attitudinal life. In fact, all the statements on bhakti emphasize the need to arrest the dissipations of the mind and focus it on the object of one's identification. The final state of bhakti is *atmanivedan*, surrender of the self, but its initial stage is the positive and qualitative transformation of the gross, lower mind. This is achieved with the help of mantras and yantras, as they create a connection with the Supreme Element.

Are the mantra practices of bhakti yoga also included as practices of nada yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The practices meant for bhakti yoga are included as practices of nada yoga. When a bhakti yogi performs mantra japa, in the first stage he tries his best to maintain awareness of the sound produced by the mantra. After having developed a deeper awareness of the sound of the mantra, he stops producing an audible sound vibration and in the second stage he tries to intensify his awareness on the basis of the mantra repeated in whispered tones.

When this task is accomplished satisfactorily, he stops whispering and repeats the same mantra mentally. He tries to hear the mental and subtle notes which, though inaudible, can be visualized through a deeper form of awareness. Sometimes at this stage, it is possible to actually experience hearing the same mantra internally. The bhakti yogi will feel as if he has really chanted the mantra in an audible tone. When the awareness of mental mantra chanting is

absorbing and the mind is completely fused in a deep realm of awareness, mantra or nada is transformed into a constant inaudible repetition which will appear to the aspirant on the plane of consciousness as audible, but it will be imperceptible and inaudible to others. This is the way to experience the nada in the practice of mantra yoga by bhakti yogis.

What is the difference between mantra and prayer?

Swami Niranananda: Prayer is said to take the expression of the heart to God. When people have troubles, they express it to Him. They also express their gratitude. Mantra is to make one introverted and reach the depths of one's being. Mantra connects one to oneself and prayer expresses one's bhava or feeling.

What are bhakti mantras and what is their effect?

Swami Satyananda: Bhakti mantras like *Om Namah Shivaya*, *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya* and others help one to correct oneself, to transform one's nature, and overcome difficulties, worries, anxieties and passions in life.

What is the power of mantra for a bhakta?

Swami Sivananda: Every name is filled with countless *shaktis* or potencies. The practice of japa, repetition of mantra, removes the impurities of the mind, just as soap cleanses the cloth of its impurities. Japa destroys the sins and brings the devotee face to face with God.

The glory of the name of God cannot be established through reasoning and intellect. It can certainly be experienced or realized only through devotion, faith and constant repetition. One should have reverence and faith for the name of God. Devotees of Hari can repeat the mantras *Hari Om* or *Om Namo Narayanaya*. Devotees of Sri Ram can repeat *Sri Rama*, or *Sitaram*, or *Om Sri Ram*, *Jaya Ram*, *Jaya Jaya Ram*. Devotees of Sri Krishna can repeat *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*. Devotees of Shiva can repeat *Om Namah Shivaya*.

In this Iron Age, or Kali Yuga, japa is the easiest, quickest, safest and surest way to reach God and attain immortality and perennial joy.

How important is it to have a mantra in bhakti yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Even if one becomes a jivanmukta, a siddha, a muni or a rishi, still it is important to have respect and devotion for all forms of divinity. However, for personal evolution a mantra is necessary. When an aspirant takes a mantra from the guru with *shraddha*, *bhakti* and *nishtha*, faith, devotion and sincerity, then that mantra becomes a part of the mind and a part of the emotions. Every morning and night when practising that mantra, one is trying to concentrate the mind. A one-pointed mind is powerful. When the mind does not have any point, when it is running hither and thither, it is a weak mind.

Which practice helps a bhakta merge with the Divine?

Swami Sivananda: Meditate on *Om*. Close the eyes. Relax the muscles and nerves completely. Concentrate the gaze at *trikuti*, the space between the two eyebrows. Silence the objective or conscious mind. Repeat *Om* mentally with *shuddha bhavana*, purity of feeling, or Brahma bhavana. This bhavana is sine qua non. Repeat *Om* with the bhava or feeling that one is in the infinite, all-pervading, pure intelligence. Mere gramophonic repetition or parrot-like repetition of *Om* will not bring about the desired result.

When thinking of *Om*, the bhakta will have to think of Brahman. Association with *Om* is to become one with the signified. The bhakta will try to identify with the all-blissful Self when meditating on *Om*, keeping the meaning of *Om* at heart, feeling that one is the all-pervading, infinite light, feeling that one is the pure, perfect, all-knowing, eternally free Brahman, absolute consciousness, infinite, unchanging existence. Every atom, every molecule, every nerve, vein and artery should powerfully vibrate with these ideas. Lip repetition of *Om* will not produce much benefit. It should be

through the heart, head and soul. One's whole soul should feel that one is the subtle, all-pervading intelligence.

How can a bhakta practise a mantra in daily life to increase the sense of devotion?

Swami Satyananda: The most important part is continual awareness of the breath and the mantra while in a relaxed mood – normal, spontaneous breathing, awareness of the breath and the mantra with the breath, and thinking all the time, who is God to me and who am I to Him. Who is He and who am I? What is my relationship with Him? Most people have not discovered this. They worship God as something apart from themselves, and forget that they are related to Him.

The mantra and sankalpa should be repeated every night before going to sleep. In this way, day by day, the feeling of bhakti will arise from deep within and like the saints and sages of the past who sang and wrote about the glory of the supreme in their devotional songs and poetry, the aspirant will experience bhakti in every sphere of existence and know the feeling of unity.

Is there an example of a saint who used a mantra daily?

Swami Satyananda: There was a great Indian saint named Gouranga. He was a great scholar and wrote a thesis on economics. He was a householder and one day all of a sudden he developed intense love for God. He began to think that he was the wife and God was the husband. He renounced everything and embraced sannyasa. He was a devotee of Sri Krishna and used to sing the name day and night. Thousands of people used to follow him. He said that when one's mind is totally corrupted and one does not find enough strength to control the mind, all other forms of yoga do not really work. When the mind is tossed by desires and passions, devotion to God is not honest devotion. When one is having sensual fantasies, and the mind is filled with terror, how can one think about God and transcend gross

awareness? The easiest way is to sing His name. Other than this there is no sadhana.

A devotee requires only three qualities to reach God. Firstly, he should become humble like a blade of a grass. Secondly, he should be as full of endurance as a tree which faces summer, winter, storms, everything. The third quality is singing His name. One who has these three qualities can have the vision of the Divine.

Gouranga gave the mantra *Hare Ram Hare Ram, Ram Ram Hare Hare, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare*. He sang this name throughout the country.

SMARANA

How can one practise one's japa with regularity?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are two aspects of mantra. The first aspect is sadhana and second aspect is remembrance. People think of mantra as sadhana only, that they have to sit, hold the mala, do one mala, two mala, three mala, whatever is prescribed. People become obsessed with a ritual. Sadhana becomes a ritual. Even mantra japa has become a ritual. When a sadhana becomes a ritual, there are times that the mind will break from sadhana. Therefore, in yoga two ideas have been given. The first idea is of sadhana and the second idea is of remembrance.

When one thinks of anything as a sadhana, a ritual, then the mind is cut due to circumstances. However, when mantra is done as remembrance, then even while walking with every step one can repeat a mantra, five minutes, seven minutes, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes. Five hundred steps, five hundred mantras, one hundred steps, one hundred mantras, one thousand steps, one thousand mantras. In this manner one is actually doing more mantra than one would do as a sadhana. That is known as remembrance. It is spontaneous, simple, and does not involve any force to do something. It is effortless and natural.

What is an example of the kind of awareness a devotee should have for God?

Swami Satyananda: My dog Bholenath only took about two and a half minutes to eat his meal, with one eye on the meat and one eye on me. I had to stand there all the time because if I moved he would leave his food. This is how a devotee has to feel about God and this is how a disciple has to keep the guru in mind. Is there as much love for God as my dog loved me? Is God thought about as much as my dog thought about me? Is there awareness of God all the time, as much as my dog was aware of me, twenty-four hours a day, every minute and every second? There was not even one second when he was not aware of me, his master.

Such intense concentration is seldom possible. Bholenath was the greatest example of a dedicated disciple. He did not leave me even for a moment. He always had his eyes fixed upon me and never sat with his back to me. If I ever sat behind him he too would change his position. Our relationship very much resembled the relationship that a true disciple should have with his guru or master, or a devotee should have with God.

How should one remember God?

Swami Satyananda: Remember God throughout the day. Even as a miser, greedy for riches, remembers wealth, and the murderer afraid of the police remembers them, so too one should be aware of God. Every pleasure is His, every breath is His miracle, every day is His glory, everyone is His manifestation. There comes a moment when the soul awakens – then the essential unity between the sentient and the insentient is realized.

How can the mantra be used to develop smarana?

Swami Sivananda: Mental japa can be practised by training the ears to listen to the mental repetition of the mantra. If this is difficult, one can start with the verbal repetition of the mantra, then concentrate on sound and then slowly

repeat it more and more mildly. Then one closes the lips and pronounces the mantra through the throat. Finally, even this is given up and the mantra is repeated in the heart.

Mental japa can be practised always. One can associate the mantra with all rhythmic sound: one's own footfalls, the rattling of the carriage wheels, the typewriter in the office, the tick-tick of the clock. They will repeat the mantra. To help this in the initial stages, a mala should be always kept in one's pocket. As one walks or sits idle, one can roll beads with the mental repetition of the mantra. The mind will quickly become accustomed to the constant repetition.

What is the importance of remembrance of God's name for a bhakta?

Swami Sivananda: *Smarana* is constant remembrance of the name and form of the Divine at all times. The mind does not think of any object of the world, but is ever engrossed in thinking of God alone. The mind meditates on what is heard about the glorious Divinity. The mind meditates on His virtues and name and forgets even the body. Japa comes under this category of upasana. Remembrance includes stories pertaining to God, talking of God, teaching others about God, meditation on the attributes of God.

Worship of the Divine through smarana has no time limit, as God is to be consciously remembered at all times without a break. The worship begins from the moment the devotee awakes in the morning until he is completely overpowered by sleep at night. He has no other duty in this world. Remembrance of God alone can destroy worldly tendencies. It can turn the mind away from sense objects. Generally the mind runs outward to the sensual world, but remembrance of God makes it introverted.

Remembrance of God is a difficult method of sadhana. It is not possible to remember God at all times. The mind will cheat and the person will think that he is meditating on God when actually he will be dreaming of some object of the world or something connected with name and fame.

Remembrance is equal to concentration or meditation. The qualities which a raja yogi prescribes for the practice of meditation should be acquired by a bhakta who wants to practise smarana bhakti. Smarana is swimming against the forceful current of the river of Maya. Smarana leads to exclusive meditation on God, as is done in raja yoga.

The company of real devotees is another necessity in remembrance of God. Serving mahatmas is still another necessity. The mind cannot but remember divine things when it is in the company of divine people. Therefore, one should have satsang and always live with a saint or a great bhakta. He should not be perturbed by censure or ridicule from the world. He should rely on God and rest assured that God will help him in all troubles and He will give him final emancipation. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (12:2):

*Mayyaaaveshya mano ye maam nityayuktaa upaasate;
Shraddhayaa parayopetaaste me yuktatamaa mataaah.*

Those who, fixing their minds on Me, worship Me, ever steadfast and endowed with supreme faith, these are the best in yoga in My opinion.

Remembrance of the Divine has given liberation even to those who remembered Him through hatred, just as a worm, by meditation on the wasp due to hatred and fear, attains the state of the wasp. Haters of the Divine like Kamsa and Shisupala attained the state of moksha through *veera bhakti*, negative devotion. Constant remembrance is the fruit of almost all other methods of practice in spiritual sadhana. This is the most potent method and the most difficult.

The miser does not forget his wealth even if engaged in other duties. The lustful man does not forget his beloved, and the cow does not forget its calf even while grazing. Similarly, a worldly person, even though he may be engaged in other duties of life, should practise remembrance of God. Prahlad practised remembrance of God. He never forgot God at any time. He was punished by his cruel

father in all possible ways, but the devoted Prahlad crossed over all troubles and obtained the supreme grace of God. Prahlad was lost in awareness of God. Such should be the ardent aspiration of devotees. The seventh Skandha of the *Bhagavata* gives a beautiful description of how Prahlad practised bhakti even amidst trying conditions.

How can one practise remembrance of God in daily life?

Swami Sivananda: The *para bhakta* or supreme bhakta considers even eating and sleeping, walking and talking as acts of worship of the Divine. He does not separate divine and ordinary life. Even while engaged in daily life, all activities may be turned into upasana by constant remembrance of God with divine bhava. Therefore, one should always maintain the right mental attitude during any work and feel that it is God within who eats and sleeps. The ego will be completely effaced and that is absolute surrender to the Divine.

What advice did your guru give you for constant remembrance?

Swami Satyananda: My guru, Swami Sivananda, used to ask me, “Do you remember His name all the time?” I would reply, “Swamiji, I try but mostly I forget because I am so busy with administration.” He would say, “While doing administration work, you still remember to eat, sleep and go to the toilet. You don’t forget those things so how can you forget this most natural thing, because God’s name is your very breath.” One’s whole life has to be dedicated to this. A Thakur poet has also said:

Our ears cannot hear any other name,
This thread has been coloured in only one dye.
If the tongue utters another name, even by mistake,
We will drown the tongue and the entire mouth,
Tying them together inside deadly poison.
Poet Thakur says this is the bent of our heart,

We cannot forget the Lord's name in any way.
Those mad eyes which want to see fair skin
Instead of that of dark Sri Krishna should be burnt.

How can one maintain unbroken awareness of God?

Swami Satyananda: During or after yoga practices many people experience a feeling of joy, whether slight or intense, due to the wakefulness, calmness and awareness which the practices give them, but this feeling is quickly lost when continuing with the daily duties. One becomes ensnared again in the ups and downs of everyday life, but this need not be the case. Through bhakti and continuous effort to remember the object of devotion, this awareness and joy can be maintained.

When a person has this intensity of feeling, how is it possible not to remember? What is the express train to expanded awareness? The great bhakta Ramdas said, "The quickest and easiest way to the Supreme is to remember Him always by repeating His sweet and powerful name." This name is a mantra. Chanting it verbally or mentally with awareness of its meaning harmonizes the whole mind. One is less influenced by the ups and downs of the tumultuous world. One becomes more aware. The whole mind becomes concentrated and powerful. This continual remembrance breaks down the ego, body and mind identification. It leads to knowledge and fulfilment. The great bhakta Kabirdas sang:

I declare to the loud beat of a drum
That, with every breath that passes
Without remembering the name of the Lord,
Thou art losing the chance to conquer the three worlds,
The chance to reach those spiritual heights.

What is essential when repeating the name of God?

Swami Satyananda: Remembrance helps to prevent the relapse into automated living patterns and thought. This ceaseless remembrance is a powerful practice for expanding

awareness, but it is not easy without devotion. Love and bhakti make a person remember. There has to be a natural attraction to the sweetness of the name or mantra of one's deity. Bees are automatically attracted to the nectar in a flower.

This remembrance must be spontaneous. Many of the great poets have beautifully illustrated this continual remembrance. For them the supreme is a helper, a dearest and nearest friend, nearer than breath, nearer than their own mind. This is beautifully expressed by Lord Tennyson:

Speak to Him, thou, for He heareth
And spirit to spirit can speak.
Nearer is He than breathing,
Closer than hands and feet.

In daily life, what is a practical way of developing devotion?

Swami Satyananda: One should think that wherever one is sitting is one's temple, whatever one is doing is serving God. This is what one's bhavana should be. If harvesting the rice, then the field is the temple of God. After all, grain is a form of God, a devata; water is a form of God, a devata; earth is a goddess, a devi; wind is a devata called Pawan, the father of Hanuman. God is everywhere. One can keep reflecting on God and always sing the name of God. Shabari, Draupadi, Dhruva and Prahlad sang His name. There is so much strength in the name of God!

One should inculcate devotion with the same intensity of feeling that insects have for light. Kabirdas has gone one step further. He has said that there should be awareness of consciousness with every breath in and out, in such a way that with each breath – twenty-one thousand six hundred breaths a day – only *So Ham, So Ham, So Ham* should be heard. If done properly *anahad nada*, the unstruck sound, will automatically be awakened. In the celestial words of Gorakhnath, he spoke of the awakening of anahata chakra when one can hear the celestial music.

What is an example of a more advanced practice of remembrance?

Swami Satyananda: Normally a person takes fifteen to eighteen breaths a minute, but those who practise meditation have a slower breathing rate. In an hour there will be nine hundred breaths and in twenty-four hours there will be twenty-one thousand six hundred breaths, which means being conscious of the sound of *So Ham* with each and every breath. This can be practised only when one is capable of withholding one's urine, stool, hunger and thirst and above all one's sleep – when there are no distractions of any kind. One stops urinating, defecating, eating food and sleeping, and there are no fluctuations, no distractions of mind. Only then can one be aware of *So Ham* twenty-one thousand six hundred times in the twenty-four hours.

What is a good daily routine to invoke the remembrance of God's name?

Swami Satyananda: I inaugurate and close the day with God's name. I have a 'wake up' clock, which is set to ring every morning at 2 am. It is programmed to chant the name of God for forty minutes at a time. It wakes me up and the first thing I listen to is God's name. So I get up from my bed and sit down to sing for forty minutes:

*Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram Patita Pavana Sitaram, Sri
Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram.*

Then I get up, wash and start my japa. My wish is that, 'O God, when I sleep You should be the last one I remember, and when I wake up Your name should be the first thing that I hear'. Anything that is begun well, ends well.

When most people open their eyes in the morning, the first thing they see is this idiotic world. What is there to look at? People look at the world the whole day because they have to, but it should be forgotten, at least for forty minutes, and God's name listened to. Everyone should start the day with God's name. God won't be unhappy if His name is not

repeated. People pray not for God, but for themselves. Even if they abuse God, He will still shower His grace upon them. God does not get angry or punish anyone. When one chants His name, it is for oneself. It is said in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Sundarkand, after doha 31, chau 2):

*Kaha hanumanta bipati prabhu soee
Jaba tava sumirana bhajana na hoee*

O Lord, said Hanuman,
Whenever I do not remember Thee
Or recite Thy name
That is the period of my distress.

How should a bhakta approach death?

Swami Satyananda: There is something called the last breath. What should a man's thought be at the time of the last breath? Everybody has a last thought. One may not be aware of one's first thought as one was not totally conscious at that time, but there is certainly a last thought and a last breath. There is certainly a last action also, such as drinking water, doing japa, going to the toilet, talking to somebody. What should one's last act, one's last thought and one's last breath be? It should be God's name, because that thought determines one's onward journey. Tulsidas has written in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Kishkinda, after doha 9, chau 2):

*Janma janma muni jatanu karaahee,
Anta raama kahi aavata naahee.*

Birth after birth the munis keep trying;
Still the name of Rama
Does not come from their mouths
At the time of death.

Just as sugar becomes one with milk, let the mind melt in God. There is no use controlling the mind because there is no mind as such. One should just sing and sing the name of God with proper tune and pitch, rhythm and beat. Good

food, sweets, tea, coffee, even brandy do not generate as much heat as singing God's name. There is no other alternative and no better means to reach God than singing His name.

My only wish is that when my prana leaves the body, I may have the name of Govinda on my lips. While I live, let me remember His name and when I am dying, let the last breath of my life be His name.

O Govinda, this is my prayer.
Not to forget your name for a moment.
Let me chant these names night and day,
Govinda, Damodar and Madhava.
This is my last wish,
That at the time of death
You should be before me,
Playing your flute
And pleasing my mind.
Let me leave my body
While chanting these names,
Govinda, Damodar and Madhava.

What is the practice of remembrance?

Swami Niranjanananda: To perfect bhakti, whether bheda or abheda, the best method is remembrance, not japa. Japa is difficult. One cannot hold the mind steady when one is doing mantra japa. The mind shifts from one thing to another, and one has to struggle to pull it back. However, memory can be constant and be a part of one's normal daily activity. While one is driving, eating, sitting, watching television, reading the newspaper, doing anything and everything, you can maintain the memory, *smarana*.

It is similar to remembering and maintaining the memory of one's child who is in a foreign land. One does not connect with the child by continuously repeating the name of the child. One connects with the child through remembrance. Whenever the remembrance comes, the

same sentiments, emotions and love are felt, irrespective of whether the child is close or far away. The sentiments are the same regardless of the distance.

Disciples cultivate such abheda bhakti with their guru. Sri Swami Satyananda always says, “Swami Sivananda is with me all the time. I talk to him, he talks to me.” I am having glimpses of this experience. I can feel his presence, I can talk to him, he talks to me. It is not an achievement or a siddhi, it is the deepening of a connection; it is remembrance. That is the bhakti which Sage Vasishtha talks about to Sri Rama.

MANTRA JAPA

What is japa?

Swami Satyananda: In Sanskrit, the word *japa* means ‘to rotate’. Faithful Christians and Hindus can be seen rolling the beads. Turning the mala represents rotation of consciousness, not just rotation of beads. The word *yoga* means ‘union’ or ‘communion’; it means becoming one, losing the sense of duality. So the meaning of *japa yoga* is union with the highest existence through rotation of consciousness.

What is consciousness? Consciousness is a term referring to awareness, whether it be mental, psychic or spiritual. Even the unconscious is a state of consciousness. This practice, however, is primarily concerned with mental consciousness or awareness. Rotation of consciousness means that there should be a point at which one sets one’s awareness rotating and after some time one comes back to the same point where one started, without missing it. During the rotation the consciousness may go this way or that, it may go in a triangle, not necessarily in a circle, but one must always return to the starting point.

What methods can be used to remember God?

Swami Niranjanananda: How does one remember God? Either by remembering a name or a form. These are the two methods for recognition of anything. If one thinks of

somebody, the person's form appears in front of one's eyes. If one thinks or speaks of somebody, the name comes to the tip of the tongue. Any manifest object is always identified by either name or form. For God, the name is the mantra. By remembering and repeating the mantra or by focusing the mind at chidakasha on the image of the ishta devata, one cultivates awareness of the higher Self. These are the two common practices of meditation: mantra meditation and symbol meditation.

The two methods can be practised separately, however, they are most effective when practised together. While chanting the mantra, focus on the symbol or image. In this way, the mind is fixed in two dimensions. At the visual level it is seeing the image and at the thought level it is repeating the mantra. At the sensorial level the mind is seeing the image and at the mental level it is repeating the mantra.

What happens when a bhakta practises japa?

Swami Satyananda: Japa is practised by all faiths, but maybe without understanding its psychological import. The emotional energy should be sublimated and properly channelled for constructive work. Bhakti is the best method of sublimation. Japa is the easiest and safest way by which a person can elevate this state of consciousness, by reciting the name of the Divine in a particular manner, either alone or in a group.

In japa a rhythm is slowly created and then a momentum is produced in the brain. After a while the mind loses touch with external objects and the consciousness is withdrawn and elevated. A blissful state is reached and eventually it brings one to a state that is higher than pratyahara. Sometimes it gives a glimpse of meditation. Thus it can be seen that japa is not repetition of God's name for the sake of repetition, and it is not only for Hindus.

What is the purpose of practising japa?

Swami Niranjanananda: Japa is not only the repetition of God's name, or religious and mystical identification. It is not

even repetition of a mantra. It is constant remembrance that I who live in this body, the individual self, and the cosmic Self which pervades the entire universe are one. In japa, the essence has to be realized. A raindrop and water in the river or ocean are two different things, but they are composed of the same essence or matter. If the raindrop thinks that, "I am a raindrop and not of the same essence as water," then there is a difference. Japa is the process of identifying with the divine or cosmic nature. It is a method by which a person who has attained *viveka*, discrimination, and *vairagya*, dispassion, can disassociate the individual self from the manifest dimension and link with the cosmic dimension.

To come to this level of japa, one has to begin with a mantra and a mala, because when one repeats a mantra psychically, changes take place. Externally there is a sense of happiness, quietness, peace, contentment and a release of stress. Other symptoms are experienced internally at a deeper psychic level which one is not aware of. They represent the changing of the energies which govern the body and mind, the awakening of the pranas in the body and mind. Japa is a process of identification between an individual and the cosmic state or *sattwa*.

Is japa a particularly suitable practice for bhaktas?

Swami Satyananda: Everything that exists has vibration, whether good or bad. It is in the voices, the sound. Mantras are powerful because they have good vibrations. That is how they are made. These words were heard by the ancient rishis and munis during deep states of meditation. There are certain syllables and words belonging to the personality, and these are called mantras because these specific words and letters have such a positive vibration. Repeating them gives a good vibration. Mantra repetition can also be repetition of the name of God, but the name of God and mantra are not the same.

There are individual mantras for different personalities, and also collective mantras. The individual mantras are

secret. When one receives a mantra and repeats it, it produces such a vibration, not only in the physical body but in the whole being. It tranquillizes and calms the mind when it is continuously repeated. Normally the mind is functioning automatically, thinking and thinking all the time, even if one does not want to think. While repeating the mantra, or even when singing or chanting collective mantras together, a state is usually obtained where one can think what one wants to think, reject what one does not like to think, visualize the things one wants to visualize and reject the visions one does not want. This means control of the mind; one is driving the mind, the mind is not the driver.

Mantra japa is considered a religious yoga because all religious people repeat their god's name. They try to visualize the photo or statue of their god or their guru. This devotion is always good, never bad. Even if a person has no devotion or faith, the practice of mantra will bring real faith, real devotion, not blind faith. It will bring correct understanding. It will give a positive and true idea; it will help the aspirant to study and understand easily.

There is something higher than psychic awareness, which is the ultimate answer, which is a secret personality. Spiritual awareness is said to be awareness of the self within, but it is a state of unconsciousness of outer and objective consciousness. When one approaches spiritual awareness, one becomes conscious within, but gradually one becomes unaware of the outer object and events, including oneself.

The practice of japa develops spiritual vision in the aspirant. This means that japa is something like a drug, the effects of which are spread throughout the personality and not only restricted or limited to the body, as happens in the case of drug treatment, or to the mind in the case of hypnotic treatment. The effects of japa are unlimited. They are widespread from the body right up to the psychic level. This is why not only the great saints but even ordinary people everywhere have stuck to this method and process of japa.

How can a bhakta practise japa?

Swami Satyananda: Before starting the practice of japa, invocation of the deity is necessary. During invocation certain prayers have to be said. These prayers are not in the form of begging but in the form of calling. In Sanskrit it is called *stuti*, singing the praises of God. For this particular purpose only certain slokas should be repeated, not all. Although in Sanskrit there are many prayers in which the author is demanding liberation, money, prosperity or peace, in this practice nothing like that is being done.

In the invocation there is a clear-cut picture of the deity or the devata. For instance, the well-known deity of learning, Saraswati, is figuratively described, giving a clear picture of Her. In India there are anthropomorphic symbols of all descriptions and therianthropic symbols, combining human and animal forms. The geometrical symbols are not in common use; maybe they do not have the human touch.

Invocation is a part of the esoteric science of japa yoga. There are beautiful songs and incantations that can be chanted. The invocation should be made in clear language. After that the spiritual aspirant takes up japa with the mala.

How can japa become worship?

Swami Sivananda: There is no yoga greater than japa yoga. It can give whatever one wants. It ultimately results in samadhi or communion with God. Japa must become habitual and must be attended with sattwic or divine feeling, purity, love and faith.

Japa must be undertaken seriously and sincerely. The chanting of His name is but serving Him. There must be the same flow of love, devotion and respect in the heart at the time of thinking or remembering His name as one may naturally have at the time one really sees Him. One should have full faith and belief in the eternity of the name.

The bhakta should feel His presence in everything and everywhere. He should draw closer to Him when repeating

the japa and think that He is shining in the chambers of his heart and witnessing the mantra repetition, being the witness of his mind.

What happens when one constantly repeats His name?

Swami Sivananda: One who repeats God's name with faith, devotion and a one-pointed mind will conquer the mind in the end. Chanting God's name brightens the mirror of the mind, burns the forest of desires and bathes the whole being in a flood of joy.

God's name is like a lamp kept in the doorway, giving light both inside and outside the room. In the same way, keeping God's name always on the tongue will give peace within and without. Just as fire consumes the dross and releases pure gold from its impure ores, so also does God purify the heart, burn all the dross of the lower nature and release one as a pure soul. No one obtains liberation without the name of the Divine. The highest duty is to repeat His name always.

What are the benefits of japa?

Swami Sivananda: There is power and potency in every mantra. When japa of a mantra is done with intensity it sets up spiritual vibrations which transform the subconscious mind. It changes the mental substance from passion to purity, from rajas to sattwa. It calms and strengthens the mind and makes it introspective, checking its outgoing tendencies. It eradicates evil thoughts and inclinations, destroys vasanas and reduces the force of thought. Eventually it leads to the direct darshan of God or the ishta devata. Japa purifies the mind, induces dispassion and brings one face to face with God.

After sufficient practice of japa the conscious mind gains the much-needed balance and tranquillity and becomes fit to receive, through the superconscious mind, the divine energy of God, the fountain source of all powers.

What is the ideal speed to practise japa?

Swami Sivananda: With japa it is always better to adopt a medium speed. It is not the speed but the bhava and concentration that bring about the maximum benefits in japa. There must be *akshara shuddhi* in repetition, clear pronunciation and no mutilation of any word. This is important. Some people finish one lakh of japa daily within seven hours in a hurried manner; just as a hired carpenter or contractor does the work in order to have the wages. There can be no real devotion in having a contract with God.

There is one advantage in doing japa with electric speed. If the mind is dull and wandering wildly in sensual objects, a high speed can be kept up for fifteen or twenty minutes. This will stimulate the dull mind and bring it back quickly to the point of focus.

How can japa be practised as a form of prayer?

Swami Satyananda: The mantra should be repeated morning and night or whenever one is free. It should be done in the morning on waking, before getting out of bed. With eyes closed and mala in hand one repeats the mantra or the name of one's ishta devata. While repeating it there should be the feeling, "Though I don't see God I know he is here."

When the intellect starts to interrupt the flow, one must contradict its every suggestion, for the intellect never tells the truth. It is the greatest liar I have ever experienced in my life. It is the greatest cause of confusion and cannot be relied on. Intellect is necessary to earn money, to run the family, business, education, industry and politics, but it has no place where devotion to the Divine is concerned.

At the end of the japa say, "I want my devotion for You to increase like the moon that grows to become a full moon. It should not wane only grow." This should be the only *sankalpa* or resolution, the only prayer day after day, every morning, every night: 'Let my love and attachment and faith for You increase more than it was yesterday. Let me feel Your presence in conscious, subconscious and unconscious life. Wherever I

am, let me feel Your divine being.’ Like a man with a beautiful new girlfriend, no matter what he does, even whilst working, she is always before him. He may not see her, say her name or even think of her on a conscious level, but he is aware of her all the time on the subconscious plane of the mind. It is this kind of awareness of God that one must have in life.

Every night before one goes to sleep one should again repeat the mantra and sankalpa. In this way, day by day the feeling of bhakti will arise from deep within and like the saints and sages of the past who sang and wrote about the glory of the supreme in their devotional songs and poetry, one will experience bhakti in every sphere of one’s existence, and know the feeling of unity.

Why is it important, from the point of view of bhakti yoga, to have a different mala for japa from the one that is worn around the neck?

Swami Satyananda: In bhakti yoga, japa can be done with any mala. After all, God doesn’t make any differentiation between one mala and another. When the psychic and subtle aspects about which yogis and practitioners are careful are taken into account, then from that point of view the mala which is worn should be used only for wearing, and the mala used for japa practice should be used only for japa.

Is japa a suitable practice for Kali Yuga?

Swami Sivananda: Japa is an important limb of yoga. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Sri Krishna says (10:25):

Yajnaanaam japayajno’smi.

Among yajnas I am japa yajna.

In this Kali Yuga the practice of japa alone can give eternal peace, bliss and immortality. Japa ultimately results in *samadhi* or communion with God. Japa must become habitual and must be attended with sattwic bhava, purity, prem and shraddha. There is no yoga greater than japa yoga.

What is the power of japa and bhakti when one has intense feeling?

Swami Niranjanananda: In a story from ancient times, there was a king who had two wives and one son from each wife. The younger wife was beautiful. So, naturally the king favoured the younger wife and her son more. The elder wife, Suniti, was also beautiful. She was a pious, innocent, pure and simple lady. She did not have a materialistic nature and was not interested in jewellery or finery. She was happy fulfilling her duty and role as the queen. Her son's name was Dhruva. The young, beautiful and glamorous queen had her eye on the throne for her son. However, the rule of the land was that the elder son took the seat of the king. Therefore, the younger queen ensured that the elder son would not come near the king too often, while her own son would be in the presence of the king most of the time, playing with the king, tickling him, pulling his beard, twirling his moustache, and doing the naughty things that little children do.

One day, when Prince Dhruva was about eleven, he came to the king's apartment and saw the stepmother with her son. This young Prince Dhruva, in his innocence, came running to the king, gave him a big hug and said, "I want to sit on your lap." The stepmother told Prince Dhruva, "No, you cannot sit on the lap of your father. His lap is reserved for my son. Get out of here." Prince Dhruva was dejected and went crying to his mother and said, "Why does the younger mother not allow me to sit on the king's lap?" The elder queen knew. She said, "It doesn't matter. Why don't you go and sit on the lap of everybody's father?" She said this to divert the attention of the young prince, but he took it literally. He said, "All right, I shall go and search for that one who is father of everyone and I will sit on his lap. Where does he live?" The mother said, "I don't know. You have to go and find out where he lives." The young prince said, "All right, I will go and search for the Great Father."

The eleven-year old boy left the palace in search of his father, walking through towns, jungles and forests, crossing

rivers and calling out, “Father, father, where are you? Come to me!” He was searching for his father in every nook and corner. One day, Sage Narada looked at this boy and took pity on him. He decided to come and help him. He said to Dhruva, “My son, where are you going?” The little prince said, “I am searching for my Great Father.” Sage Narada said to him, “You don’t have to search for him anywhere. Sit down and call out to him. He will hear you and will come to you.” The little prince said, “I know he is the Great Father, but what is his name?” Sage Narada replied, “The name of the Great Father is Narayana. Call him by saying *Om Namō Narayana, Om Namō Narayana, Om Namō Narayana.*” In this way, Sage Narada initiated the little Prince Dhruva into mantra.

The little prince sat down, happy to know the name of the Great Father. He sat down under a tree and started calling out the mantra *Om Namō Narayana, Om Namō Narayana, Om Namō Narayana.* He repeated the mantra over and over, again and again, so much so that he became totally absorbed in the repetition of the mantra. The intensity of emotion was such: “I want to see my father, I am calling out to him, he has to come, he will hear me.”

Due the intensity of his faith, God appeared before him and said, “What do you want, my son?” Dhruva, the little prince, started to cry. God of course knew what was happening, but nevertheless he asked the question, “What do you want, my son?” Dhruva broke down. No words came out of his mouth. He was ecstatic, looking at this beautiful figure of his father, Narayana. He was filled with love and immense joy, which brought tears to his eyes. He stood there, with tears streaming down his eyes, speechless. God just picked him up and made him sit on his lap. Then he said, “Your mother is worried about you. Go back home to the palace and I will give that kingdom to you, as your father. You will rule that kingdom for me on my behalf.”

With a heavy heart, Prince Dhruva made his way back to the palace. The Maharaja had been desolate after Dhruva

left. He atoned for his ill treatment of the little child and his heart underwent a great change. He honoured Suniti, whom he had ignored for so long. On hearing that Dhruva was on his way back, the Maharaja was filled with joy. Accompanied by the queens, courtiers and Brahmmins he rushed to welcome Dhruva. Seeing his son, he dismounted from his elephant and prostrated himself on the ground, before gathering him into a warm embrace. Bowing in respect to his father, his mother and step mother, Dhruva was then led into the palace.

Soon afterwards, the Maharaja renounced the kingdom and placed Dhruva on the throne. Dhruva reigned for a long time with an attitude of non-attachment to the world. His heart and mind were always fixed on God. Eventually he left the throne. Bathing in the holy river Mandakini at Badrikashram, he began unbroken meditation in isolation. A divine chariot with God's attendants descended and took Dhruva into the heavens. There he shines to this day, as the Pole Star – the eternal symbol of steadfast devotion to the Divine.

People are searching for God here, there, everywhere to have that experience, understanding, knowledge and awareness of the resplendent being in life which is God. In bhakti one has the ability to invoke God. God comes through bhakti; one does not have to search anywhere. When the bhakta is sitting quietly and doing the mantra, God will manifest.

GOD'S NAME

What effect do mantras have on the mind?

Swami Sivananda: Uttering the word 'excreta' or 'urine' in front of a person who is eating may cause that person to vomit his food. Thinking of hot pakoras will make a person salivate. There is shakti in every word. When such is the case with ordinary words, what about the names of the Divine? Repeating or thinking of His name has a tremendous influence on the mind. It transforms the mental substance,

chitta, overhauls the vicious old samskaras in the mind, transmutes the demonic, diabolical nature and brings the devotee face to face with God.

What is the purpose of repeating God's name?

Swami Sivananda: God's name is your boat and sankirtan is your raft. Cross this ocean of samsara with this boat and raft. The name of God is a verbal embodiment of the concept of the Supreme Being. The Supreme is infinite, but as it is not always possible for the ordinary person to conceive of what is beyond the perception of the finite mind, the infinite truth is symbolized as forms. When repeating the name becomes a habit and the divine consciousness is kept ever awake, there ultimately remains no distinction between the name and the associated idea or object. Intuitive knowledge of the Supreme is revealed in the name itself, for the basis of all names and forms is the one primal being who manifests Himself under different names and forms, according to the faiths and tendencies existing in sects and races at different times and places.

God and His name are identical; they are inseparable. He dwells where His name is sung. The whole atmosphere becomes sanctified. Peace, purity and bliss prevail there. His name carries the message of love, and it frees the soul from affliction, unrest and bondage. His name knows no barrier or distinction. It purifies the vicious lower self and elevates it to the sublimity of universal consciousness and transcendental Godhead.

In ordinary self-consciousness there is duality between the one repeating the name and the name itself. It is confined within the rigid categories of the mind of limited concepts. Ultimately, the ordinary self-consciousness elevates into a transcendental experience, into a state of superconsciousness. The one repeating the name and the name become one. The eternally revealed truth reveals itself. The devotee realizes his oneness with the Supreme. The sense of duality, the gulf of separation between the finite

and infinite is removed. The dawn of intuition leads from bondage to freedom, from darkness to light, from mortality to immortality. He only experiences delight in the Divine. He does not even have the inclination to analyze his delight or its source; he will find that it is but his love for God. He is not conscious of anything other than God. Everything is only the manifestation of God. His all-absorbing love for God pierces through the names and forms of the universe; the universe as a whole and in its multi-phased appearance presents itself to him only as God. He feels the same intensity of love for the animate and inanimate objects of the world.

A finite, limited intellect surely cannot understand the nature of the infinite or the limitless. God's name has no limit. The scriptures present His innumerable names, for His names are infinite. So, how can a finite intellect comprehend that which transcends finitude? The glory of the divine name cannot be established through reasoning or arguments. It can be experienced only through faith and belief.

What are the benefits of repeating God's name?

Swami Sivananda: There is an unfathomable depth, intense sweetness and charm in God's name. What a lot of joy its repetition brings! What a lot of power it infuses! It destroys old sins, desires, imaginations, whims, fancies, depressing moods, sexual impulses and various innate tendencies, and exalts the aspirant to the status of divinity. It brings him face to face with God, making him realize his oneness with Him – *para bhakti* or supreme love.

God's name is all bliss. When it is chanted the mind merges in its bliss; it loses its individual entity in the bliss and becomes one with the bliss itself. It is beyond the futile explanation of the limited intellect. It can only be known through experience.

Chanted correctly or incorrectly, knowingly or unknowingly, carefully or carelessly, it is sure to give the desired result. The glory of the name of God cannot be established through reasoning and intellect. It can certainly be experienced or

realized only through devotion, faith and constant repetition. Every name is filled with countless potencies or shaktis.

Why is God's name powerful?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is a story about the name of God. A man was sick and was being treated by many medical doctors of his time, but nothing was helping him. So he called a spiritual person to try spiritual healing. That person came and started repeating God's name over the body of the sick man. The doctors who were present started to laugh and said, "What are you doing? Our medicines are not working, so why are you whispering God's name over this body?" They could not understand why this person was repeating God's name over this body filled with poison and sickness. The spiritual healer decided to give a practical example to these disbelieving doctors. He said, "You are all owls!"

In the Indian tradition, the Middle East and Asia, the owl is not the wise bird as it is in the West. It is similar to a term of abuse like calling someone an idiot, a donkey or an imbecile. The moment the healer said these words the doctors became fired up, the colours of their faces changed, they became red, their eyes bulged, their bodies got ready to fight. They said, "How dare you call us owls!" The healer said, "Look, by calling you owls this transformation has taken place. Now just imagine what will happen to this person for whom I am saying God's name!"

One should love God for it is only through God that one can find fulfilment in life. When one takes God's name it should be with love and affection. It should be with feeling. It should be with the totality of one's being. It helps to purify and strengthen the qualities of the heart; and if the heart is right, the body is right.

What are examples of the power of God's name?

Swami Sivananda: In the darkest hour only God's name will save the aspirant. Uttering the name of God caused the salvation of a great sinner like Ajamila. Ajamila was a

righteous Brahmin, who fell in love with a low-caste girl and committed many atrocious crimes. At the time of death he uttered the name of his son, Narayana. The messengers of Narayana himself came to his rescue and Ajamila was released from this world forever.

Though the house in which they lived was burnt, the Pandavas were not burnt to death, due to their immense faith in the name of Hari. The Gopalakas were not harmed by the wild fire because of their immense faith in God's name. Hanuman was not burnt, though his tail was set on fire by the *rakshasas*, demons, because of his immense faith in Sri Rama's name. Prahlad was not burnt by fire because he had taken refuge in the name of Hari. When Sita had to undergo trial by fire to test her chastity, she was not harmed for she had Sri Rama's name as her sole refuge. Vibhishana's palace was not burnt when the whole of Lanka was burnt to ashes, because of his immense faith in the name of Sri Rama. Such is the glory of God's name.

The prostitute Pingala was mysteriously transformed into a saintly lady by the power of repeating the name of Sri Rama. She had received a parrot as a present from a thief. The parrot was trained to utter the name *Sri Rama, Sri Rama*. Pingala knew nothing of Ram naama. She heard the sound *Rama, Rama* through the mouth of the parrot. It was melodious and charming and attracted Pingala. She fixed her mind on the sound and mysteriously entered into *bhava samadhi*, union with Sri Rama. Such is the power of the name of the Divine. It is a great pity that people today who have studied science have no faith in the repetition of God's name.

One who sings God's name is unconsciously raised to sublime spiritual heights. The music thrills and harmonizes the nerves and then mysteriously acts upon the mind. The devotee loses body consciousness, is immersed in joy and drinks deep the divine nectar of immortality. He experiences divine intoxication. Repetition of God's name enables the devotee to feel the divine presence, the divine glory and the divine consciousness within himself and everywhere.

Why is repetition of God's name so powerful?

Swami Sivananda: The power of sounds is tremendous. Ideas are generated in the mind by the mere hearing of sounds. Every name has a corresponding form. Sound and object are inseparable. The form related to a name at once manifests in the mind the moment that name is heard by the ears and transmitted to the mental consciousness. There are names denoting forms which are abhorred and there also names denoting forms which are much desired. Pain and pleasure become the experiences in the mind when it is aware of hateful and delightful objects, respectively, through hearing of them.

When someone suddenly shouts, "Scorpion! Scorpion!" or "Snake!" people at once jump in fright. If someone calls another person a donkey or ass, that person is annoyed and shows anger. The awareness of that supposed contact or identity with something thought to be dangerous or inferior is created in the mind.

When such is the power of the name of an ordinary thing of this world, what a tremendous power there must be in the name of God! God is the completion or the fullness of existence. Hence, the name which denotes Him is also full and perfect. Therefore, the power of the name of God is incalculable, for it is the height or the zenith of power. The name of God can achieve anything; nothing is impossible for it. It is the means to the realization of God Himself. Just as the name of a thing in this world generates awareness of it in the mind, the name of God generates God-consciousness in the purified mind and becomes the direct cause of realization of the highest perfection – God, freedom and immortality.

How often should God's name be sung?

Swami Satyananda: God's name is a high potency dose. It only needs to be sung a little, not a lot. God's name is like sugar, salt or hot chilli – a little is enough, for if it is overdone, there will be problems. If it works, it can transport one

immediately, it can teletransport one. There is an inscrutable shakti and mysterious power in God's name. All the divine potencies are hidden in it. It is a mysterious, ineffable, divine injection.

Many people take an overdose of God's name as though this will bring great benefit, but it is not necessary to do that. Only saints can manage such an overdose, for the lifestyle has to be changed completely. If one also requires an overdose of eight to ten hours of worship, then change the lifestyle, the eating, drinking and sleeping habits. So one should just sing God's name a little and enjoy it.

Is attuning to God's name one of the most important sadhanas?

Swami Satyananda: A life of *ajnana*, ignorance, has been lived for too long. The bhakta must resolve to remove that ajnana. All are children of God; He is the *param pita*, the Holy Father. An infant learns to walk, moving step by step towards the outstretched arms of its parent. Similarly, one should move towards Him, step by step, in complete surrender, not allowing any problems, great or small, to stand in the way. Nothing external can help, for the unfolding is within, not without. The treasures and riches of the world are within.

The name of God is the greatest gift one can have. Try to keep the mind in tune with the name. To keep oneself firmly anchored to the name is the highest sadhana. The glory of the name is beyond the comprehension of the human mind. In the scholastic sense of the word, the name is a mere component of a few syllables, but in reality it is not so, for the intellect fails to understand the wonder-working power of the name. It takes away *avidya*, gross ignorance. This is the experience of saints through the centuries. It was for this reason that Swami Sivananda used to say that the highest sadhana is the 'sadhana of the Name'.

What effect does remembrance of the name of God have on the physical body?

Swami Satyananda: In the human body a particular kind of juice is produced which intoxicates the brain when it is secreted. As a result the sadhaka can become divinely intoxicated. The actions of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu were those of an intoxicated person. Could any normal person behave as he did? Were the doings of Mirabai normal? Imagine leaving home and going to Mathura or Kashi. Even if there was continual fighting going on in the house, wouldn't most people be too scared to leave when they had nowhere to go? Mirabai was not scared because she had drunk the nectar and become intoxicated. The name of God had influenced her mental and physical chemistry.

What is the importance of faith in chanting God's name?

Swami Niranjanananda: The fifth form of bhakti is remembrance of God's name, God's nature and God's wisdom, with absolute faith. Faith is the natural outcome of acceptance. Once there is faith, remembrance follows, which is the key to opening one's connection with the cosmic Self. Gold is taken out of the earth, refined and made into a necklace, which one wears. Although the original appearance has changed, the essence is still gold. If that necklace falls into the lavatory, one values it enough to put the hand in to retrieve it, wash it and wear it again. In the same manner, one has to value the remembrance of God and be ready to retrieve that remembrance from any pit into which it falls.

Faith comes in bhakti and with faith comes remembrance. Remembrance is a link between the lower self and the higher Self in the form of mantra. Mantra is that force which liberates the mind, without identifying with it – *mananat trayate iti mantrah*. Normally, there is some association with every word. If somebody says to a person, "You are good," that person associates with the word 'good' and feels happy. If somebody says, "You are bad," the person associates with the word 'bad' and feels bad. Self-image and self-esteem are

affected because one tends to see oneself through the eyes of others and does not know one's real nature.

Mantras are vibrations that do not have a literal meaning or association. Rather, they are sounds produced from vibrations with particular frequencies that activate a part of the brain, the energy, chakras and consciousness. The body is full of vibrations; identification with the inherent vibrations leads one to realization of the godly nature. Knowledge of vibration has existed in the past: 'In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God', is said in the Bible. In the Upanishads it is said, *Om iti, yad ahsharam vidam* – *Om* existed, exists and will exist. *Om* is the primordial, cosmic sound.

What happens when a mantra is recited?

Swami Sivananda: Repeated recitation of the mantra produces in the mind the form of the devata or the deity connected with the mantra, which is one's ishta, and this form becomes the centre of one's consciousness when it is directly realized. It is therefore said that the mantra of the deva is the deva himself. This may explain the much misunderstood dictum of the Mimamsa philosophers that the gods do not exist apart from the mantras. This really means that when a particular mantra appropriated to a particular god is properly recited, the vibrations so set up create in the higher planes a special form which that god ensouls for the time being.

Does chanting God's name help to improve the vibrations of a place?

Swami Satyananda: The place where God's name is remembered and sung becomes pure and holy. The place where there is fighting and abuse becomes unholy and impure. God's name is like soap. Just as soap cleans clothes, so God's name washes away the dirt of many births.

These are the methods through which the *bhavana* or feeling of bhakti can be developed. People have forgotten

God. They may talk about Him, read about Him and want Him as well, but they have not worked for Him as much as they have worked for money, profession, success and children. How hard people work, day and night! People have died of heart attacks while working for their family, but nobody ever died of a heart attack while remembering God.

Is attaining moksha important to a bhakta?

Swami Satyananda: Only by being born can one enjoy the fun of joy and sorrow. Unless one is born, how will one utter the name of God? By attaining moksha, how will one be able to remember God? Is the goal to attain moksha or to be a bhakta of God? If one wants to live with God, one should not even talk about moksha. The only possibility now is to live with the name of God. Remembering the name of God is more than enough for the moment. Tulsidas has said (Balakanda, doha 26):

*Naamu raama ko kalapataru kali kalyaana nivaasu.
Jo sumirata bhayo bhaaga te tulasee tulaseedaasu.*

The name of Rama
Is the wish-fulfilling tree.
It is the source of blessings in Kali Yuga.
By remembering the name,
Tulsidas was transformed
From bhang into holy tulsi!

If God can be remembered every morning and evening with as much single-mindedness as one remembers one's sick child, beautiful wife, old mother, the sister who has gone to live in her husband's house, or a vanquished enemy, one should know that one has reached the goal, that the boat has crossed the river. However, if one wants moksha, one will have to go to the one who gives moksha.

I have read a lot about moksha. The shastras are full of this concept. Sometimes I gave lectures about *videhamukti*, liberation from the body, and *jivanmukti*, liberation in the

body. However, as far as sadhana is concerned, if one can be aware of God just as one is constantly aware of the pain in a wound, it is called *surati*, constant awareness of God. If this awareness comes, the devotee is lucky and blessed. Kabir has said:

With every breath, remember His name.
Not even one breath should pass in vain.
For no one knows whether that outgoing breath
Will ever return again.

PRAHLAD

What is the story of Prahlad chanting Ram Naam?

Swami Satyananda: King Hiranyakashipu sent his son, Prahlad, to school and a number of small children went with him. When the teacher began teaching, Prahlad protested, saying, “Why are you teaching me these worldly things? Just write the name Gopala on the slate of my heart. I cannot leave Rama Naam. I am not interested in any knowledge other than bhakti and the name of the Divine.”

The teacher reported the matter to Hiranyakashipu. Hiranyakashipu called Prahlad and reprimanded him, saying, “Prahlad, give up the chanting of Rama’s name and listen to me instead. I shall liberate you immediately.” Prahlad replied, “Why are you harassing me again and again when I have told you that I will never give up the name of Rama, who has created land, water and mountains, this whole world. If I give up the name of Rama, it would bring shame to my guru, Narada. You may drown me, burn me or kill me by any other means, but I will never give up Rama Naam.”

Hiranyakashipu flew into a rage. Drawing his sword, he charged at Prahlad, challenging his faith thus, “Let me see who will protect you now!” At that moment Narasimha, a monstrous creature, half man and half lion, came out of the pillar. He tore Hiranyakashipu to pieces and killed him instantly. That entity was God’s incarnation, who took this

form for the sake of His devotee. Several times God has saved and uplifted devotees like Prahlad.

What is the story of Prahlad?

Swami Niranjanananda: According to mythology, once upon a time a child was born to a king, and this king in his time was a powerful and dictatorial king. His name was Hiranyakashipu.

Hiranyakashipu was the leader of a powerful tribe which had conquered other kingdoms around. To this emperor was born a boy who was a devotee of Narayana and who grew up in the ashram of Sage Narada. There he imbibed many spiritual samskaras, which the king did not like as he had another mentality. The king said to his son, “What is the use of believing in something or someone which you have never seen or experienced in life? So why believe in God whom nobody can see, whom nobody can talk to? The only God in the world is the power which a human being could inherit, and that was the strength of God. The more power you have, the more divine you become.” He objected to his son worshipping Narayana. The son was also hard-headed and said, “No, the biggest ruler of the world is Narayana, not you.” This made his father angry.

Hiranyakashipu thought, ‘How can this upstart young boy challenge me, the emperor of all worlds, and keep talking about another invisible God whom nobody has seen, whom nobody has talked to, whom no one has interacted with? How can one God maintain and manage the entire universe?’

There was always a bone of discontent between the father and son. The influence of this young prince began to affect the minds of other children his age. When the dictator Hiranyakashipu saw this he became furious, and invented ways to destroy the prince. However, somehow Prince Prahlad always escaped the most difficult situations smiling.

One day, a sister of the king, who had received a special boon from Brahma, said to the king, “Look, I will destroy

this prince. The creator has given me a boon that fire will not burn me, so I can sit in a raging fire and still feel cool and calm. Everything else will burn in the fire but I will not burn because of the boon.”

A huge fire was made, and the aunt sat inside the fire with the prince on her lap. Prahlad started to chant his mantra *Om Namō Narayana* in the midst of the raging fire. Nobody could see what was happening inside the fire. When the fire subsided, they found the prince sitting in the middle chanting his mantra, and the aunt converted into a heap of ash.

The king was of course disappointed, for the prince survived and his sister was dead. He was furious and said to the prince, “Where is this God that you talk about?” The prince replied, “He is present everywhere.” The king said, “Is he present in this pillar?” kicking angrily a pillar of the palace. The prince said, “Yes, he is also present in the pillar, and he is not going to like it if you are kicking the pillar.”

The king kicked the pillar even harder, and the pillar broke in two. From inside the pillar came the figure of Narasimha, half man and half lion, an avatar of Narayana. Narayana then installed the young prince on the throne.

How does the story of Prahlad illustrate how bhakti allows one to transcend the mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first attempt on Prahlad’s life was to throw him from the mountain top, the second attempt was to have him trampled by an elephant, and the third attempt was to burn him. Finally, the last attempt made God incarnate.

People give an interpretation to the story of Prahlad. They make it a spiritual event so that one can become aware of an aspect of oneself and identify with it. The four attempts on Prahlad’s life represent the four aspects of transformation in human consciousness. What was the character of Prahlad? He was innocent, simple, without falsity or crookedness in his mind or heart. He was a child. He was only connected with love, love that he felt for his god, Narayana.

The common understanding of love is material, physical. However, love is everything in life. It is truth, light, purity and innocence. Love just spreads. When one feels love in that manner, the world looks different. The sun shines brighter, the trees look greener, the water looks bluer. The perspective changes, the mind changes. Faith and conviction are strengthened in love. Prahlad was living that. He represents the pure, innocent self connected with love, which is light, truth, bliss and God.

The other extreme is Hiranyakashipu, his father. He is an embodiment of negativity: falsity, crookedness, deviousness, arrogance, pride; everything that contradicts love. When arrogance, pride, crookedness and falsity are there in one's life, they will not allow love to manifest, just as weeds in the ground do not allow the grass to grow, although both are inherent in the soil. In order to ensure the growth of grass, one must clear the ground of weeds. To see love flower in the sense where one can experience truth, bliss, beauty and light, one has to clear the ground of weeds which restrict the growth of grass.

The first attempt was to throw the boy from the mountain top. Mountain is the mind, the tricks, the games, the plays of the mind. Therefore, to entangle the purity of the Self in the games of the mind is the first attempt of the negative destructive powers – Maya. Prahlad survived that, due to his connection with love, truth, purity. He was able to see the falsity of things. His encounter with his mind actually reinforced his conviction and faith. His sankalpa shakti became even more powerful and strong.

In the second attempt the king gave the order, "Let the elephant trample him to death." The elephant represents intellect, Ganesha, in the positive, pious, benevolent form, and as an animal in the destructive form. Even against the onslaught of buddhi, Prahlad was able to manage attractions, repulsions, recognitions, attachments, associations. He was able to maintain his equanimity. His faith, his convictions were further enforced.

The third attempt to kill the boy was through Holika, who is *chitta*, memories, remote memories which connect one to life. Memories are a binding force. Thinking of a loved one, one immediately feels, evokes a corresponding emotional response. Memories are the most powerful force. Chitta is subtle, compulsive and obsessive. A strong memory becomes compulsive and obsessive.

When the onslaught of memories tried to affect the purity and stillness of Prahlad, he sat down in meditation. Prahlad was meditating when he sat on the lap of Holika. He started remembering Narayana. The pyre was lit, the fire burned for many hours, and when the fire subsided everything was ash, only Prahlad was still seated in meditation chanting the name of Narayana.

There are memories of parents, children, events, sufferings, happiness and joy, memories of difficulties and trials and abuses, achievements and glories. They can divert the mind instantly and change the course of one's life. Holika failed. Prahlad transcended his manas, his buddhi, and his chitta, and memories exhausted themselves, just as fire will exhaust itself. Memories are fuelled, fire is fuelled by adding more stuff on top. However, if one is meditating, who is going to add more stuff? So whatever is there is burnt, finished, and then the fire dies down.

In the last attempt, the king becomes angry, takes out his sword and says, "Where is your God? You say he is everywhere, is he in this pillar?" Prahlad says, "Yes, he's everywhere." So the King strikes the pillar, and as he strikes the pillar the pillar breaks, and from that emerges the figure of Narasimha, half man and half lion.

The king is arrogance, ego, *ahamkara*. When manas failed, buddhi failed, chitta failed, then it is natural for ahamkara to be agitated.

When ego strikes against purity, innocence, light and truth, then the form that emerges is half man and half animal, for that is the character of ego. Sometimes when the ego is benevolent it is half human; when ego is destructive

it is animal. To dominate that ego, a stronger force had to emerge which was the Narasimha.

The ideas that are conveyed are simple: through simplicity, innocence and purity, one can awaken the love inside in which one unites with truth, light and with life. The onslaughts of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara are managed. At the death of ahamkara, the king, one realizes that suddenly one is an emperor of a major empire, like Prahlad.

RAM NAAM

What is the origin of the mantra: Om Sri Ram Jaya Ram Jaya Jaya Ram?

Swami Sivananda: Once upon a time, Sri Rama was seated in his council hall in Ayodhya after his return from Lanka. At the time, Sage Narada, Vishwamitra, Vasishta and many others were present to give important counsels to the king.

While discussing religious topics, Sage Narada said, “I request you all present here to give your considered opinion in the matter as to whether *Naama*, God’s name, or *Naami*, God Himself, is superior.” A heated discussion ensued on the subject. The assembly was not able to come to a definite conclusion. In the end Sage Narada gave his verdict, “Certainly *Naama* is superior to *Naami*. I shall just now prove it by a concrete example before the assembly disperses.”

Narada then called Hanuman to his side and said, “O mighty hero, when you salute in your usual way all the rishis and Sri Rama, do not salute Vishwamitra. He is only a rajarishi. He does not deserve equal treatment and respects.” Hanuman agreed. When the time of salutation came Hanuman went before all sages and prostrated before them except Sage Vishwamitra.

Then Narada said to Vishwamitra, “O great Rishi! Look at the impertinence of Hanuman. He made salutations to all except you in this assembly. You must punish him for this. Look how proud and arrogant he is.”

Vishwamitra was flaming with rage and said to Sri Rama, “O king, I have been seriously insulted by your servant Hanuman in the presence of these great rishis. He deserves death at your hands before sunset tomorrow.” Sri Rama had to obey Vishwamitra who was his guru. At the same time, Sri Rama was in a fix for he had to kill his faithful servant with his own hands, but he could not help it. The news of the proposed death of Hanuman at Sri Rama’s hands spread all over the city like wild fire.

Hanuman too was much agitated. He went to Narada and said, “O Divine Sage, save me now. Sri Rama will kill me tomorrow. I acted according to your advice. What shall I do now?” Narada said, “O Hanuman, never despair. Do as I tell you. Get up early in the morning at brahmamuhurta. Take a bath in the river Sarayu. Stand on the sand bed of the river and with folded hands repeat the mantra *Om Sri Ram Jaya Ram Jaya Jaya Ram*. I assure you, nothing will affect you.”

The next day dawned. Hanuman went to the Sarayu before sunrise, took his bath and with folded hands repeated God’s name as instructed by Rishi Narada. In the morning, crowds of citizens came to witness the ordeal through which Hanuman had to pass. Sri Rama stood at a comfortable distance from Hanuman and looked at his servant with pity and most unwillingly began to shower arrows on Hanuman. Not one could hurt Hanuman. The whole day arrows were raining on him but with no effect. Sri Rama used even terrible missiles with which he killed Kumbhakarna and other great rakshasas in the battlefield. At last Sri Rama took his Brahmastra, the unfailing missile. Vishwamitra was enraged beyond description. Hanuman repeated the mantra loudly with intense bhava and self-surrender to the Divine. He stood smiling at Sri Rama. All were struck with wonder and exclaimed *Jaya Jaya* to Hanuman.

At this juncture Narada went to Vishwamitra and said, “O sage! Control your anger. Sri Rama is tired now. The various arrows could not do anything to Hanuman. What is there even if Hanuman did not salute you? Save Rama from this

struggle. Stop him from his effort. You have now understood the glory of Sri Rama's name." Vishwamitra was moved by these words and stopped Sri Rama from killing Hanuman with the Brahmastra. Hanuman came and fell at the feet of his master and saluted Vishwamitra too for his kindness. Vishwamitra blessed Hanuman and praised his devotion to Sri Rama.

What is the significance of repeating a name and 'Rama' in particular?

Swami Sivananda: I worship Rama the name of Sri Raghunatha. It consists of *Ra*, *Aa* and *Ma*. These constitute the roots of fire, sun and moon. *Ra* is the bija of fire, *Aa* is the bija of the sun and *Ma* is the bija of the moon. It is the life breath of the Vedas. It is formless, incomparable and is the storehouse of virtues. These roots, *Ra*, *Aa* and *Ma* represent Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Protector, and Shiva the Destroyer, of the world.

Any name is a verbal embodiment of a concept. Whatever the object of conception may be, general or particular, gross or subtle, visionary or real, the name is essentially associated with it. It gives a clear, adequate expression to a particular form or object that is associated with it, so as to enable one to comprehend and distinctly retain it in one's mind.

What is the power and glory of Ram Naam?

Swami Sivananda: Sri Rama took birth in the house of King Dasharatha as his son, in order to remove the afflictions of His devotees. He underwent numerous difficulties. He destroyed the suffering of His devotees and filled their lives with joy and bliss. Those who repeat His name are freed from all afflictions. They attain the highest happiness and bliss.

After defeating Ravana, the ten-headed monster of Lanka, and rescuing Sita Devi, Rama returned to Ayodhya with Vibhishana and a few of His followers. Vibhishana was Ravana's brother but an ally of Rama. Once the coronation

was over, the dignitaries and guests made their way back to their homes.

Vibhishana, according to the wishes of Sri Rama, stayed a few days longer. The question arose as to how Vibhishana's followers were to return to Lanka without the use of the famous bridge, *setu bandha*, which had already been destroyed. To Vibhishana the problem was very easy to solve. He got a leaf from the asvattha tree, scribbled the name, 'Sri Rama' on it and secured the leaf into a knot in a piece of cloth. He handed it to one of his men saying, "Hold fast to this knot and plunge into the ocean. It will give you a safe passage."

With implicit faith, the demon, with the knot held tightly in his hand, plunged into the ocean. A miracle happened – the water in the ocean was only knee-deep. The demon thus began wading through easily. However, when he reached mid-stream, his self-conceit and faithlessness robbed him of God's benediction. He thought, "What is in this knot of our master that works such wonders?" Inquisitiveness impelled him to untie the knot to see the contents. The mere sight of a dry leaf made him laugh and scoff, and when he saw the name 'Sri Rama' scribbled on it, his contempt became such that he started doubting. "What! Can this name play such havoc with the ocean?" No sooner had this thought entered his mind than he found himself in a watery grave, due to a sudden deluge of waves in the sea.

Sri Rama saved Ahalya and bestowed immortality on her by the mere touch of His sacred feet but His name has saved countless wicked men of perverted intellect. To bless Vishwamitra, Sri Rama killed Tataka, the daughter of Suketu; but for the welfare of devotees His name destroys countless evil desires, just as the sun destroys darkness.

Sri Rama, through His own effort, broke the bow of Shiva; but the glory of His name is such that it destroys all fear of the wheel of births and deaths. Sri Rama purified the Dandaka forest; but the name purifies innumerable minds. Sri Rama destroyed a host of demons; but the name destroys

all the sins of the Kali Yuga. Sri Rama saved and blessed Shabari and Jatayu; but Ram Naam saves countless men filled with the afflictions of the Kali Yuga.

Sri Rama protected and gave shelter to Sugriva and Vibhishana; but the name gives shelter to numerous poor people. Sri Rama collected the monkeys and a big army to bridge the ocean, undergoing great suffering; but by mere repetition of His name, the ocean of samsara is dried up. Sri Rama killed Ravana and his followers in battle, then He returned to Ayodhya with Sita Devi and was crowned Emperor; but devotees, by the mere repetition of His name, destroy the mighty army of ignorance. They are immersed in the ocean of bliss and go about carefree due to the power of the name.

Why should one chant Rama's name?

Swami Satyananda: All the mahatmas say that when one chants the name of Rama, one's heart and inner mind become cleansed of all impurities. The name of Rama is a detergent, which washes away all the dross from the mind. It is a fact that all who live in the world are stained by maya and worldly life. The wise man who enters a chamber full of soot does not expect to come out immaculate.

While leading a material life, if the horse is put in front of the cart it will run very well. Life runs smoothly when the mind is fixed on God's name, like the fixation one has for one's offspring, sickness, stomach ache, headache or injury. Just as that fixation becomes the focus of attention and nothing else is of interest, similarly, the name of God should become an obsession. Generally the total mind remains in the grip of worldly experience. However, when the mind is gripped by the Divine, one's whole life is transformed, not only the external life, but the inner life as well. There is an external life of behaviour, action and reaction, and an internal life of thought, feeling, vibration and experience.

The important things in life are small, minute, infinitesimal. An atom bomb is molecular, very small in size, but

it can destroy the whole world. God's name is called 'atma bomb'. It can destroy the *asuri sampada*, the unholy powers within. It can eliminate maya, impurity, baseness, dross, fear and frustration that are defiling one from within. Saints and great souls have said this from time immemorial. Those who ignored and disregarded it were drowned in the sea of material life. Those who understood it found salvation and freedom. Those who listened to this teaching and followed it found happiness and bliss.

Why is Ram Naam a true kalpataru?

Swami Sivananda: The divine name is the bestower of psychic powers on gods and saints, enabling them to bless others. Hanuman repeated Sri Rama's name with intense devotion and became His pet. Pages can be quoted to give an account of all the devotees who attained excellence by the repetition of His name.

In this age, God's holy name is the wish-yielding *kalpataru*, 'the bestower of all desires' to those who take refuge in Him. Auspiciousness exists in the name. By repeating the name of the Lord, Sri Tulsidas attained great eminence. He became the favourite of the Lord. His celebrated work, the *Ramcharitamanas* is itself the glory of Ram Naam.

Not only in the Kali Yuga, but in all ages, at all times and in all the worlds, men have crossed the ocean of samsara through the repetition of the name of God. In the Kali Yuga, naama-japa is particularly suited for one's emancipation, just as meditation, performance of sacrifices and worship were suited to the other three ages. In this troublesome age, there is no other sadhana for emancipation. Ram Naam is the bestower of bliss and immortality. A devotee of Sri Rama ends his cycle of births and deaths. Those who have intense faith realize the infallible fruit of Ram Naam and lead a happy and peaceful life here, and attain immortality hereafter.

What has Gandhi said about Ram Naam?

Swami Sivananda: The glory of Rama is clearly seen in the Vedas and is sung by all great men. Gandhiji says, “Goswami Tulsidas has left nothing unsaid about the glory of the divine name. There is not the least shadow of doubt that the sacred formulae, such as the Dwadashakshara mantra – *Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya* – which consists of twelve syllables, and the Ashtakshara mantra – *Om Namō Narayanaya* consisting of eight syllables, bring solace to those entangled in the meshes of worldly attachment. For those, however, who have known no peace and are in search of it, the name of Rama can certainly work wonders. God is said to possess a thousand names; it means His names are infinite, His glory is infinite. That is how God transcends both His names and His glory. The support of the name, however, is absolutely necessary for people, so long as they are tied to their bodies. In the present age, even ignorant and unlettered people can take shelter in the monosyllabic mantra – *Rama*. When pronounced, the word, ‘Rama’ makes a single sound, and truly speaking, there is no difference between the sacred syllable *Om* and the word *Rama*.”

How have Tulsidas and Vyasa glorified Ram Naam?

Swami Sivananda: Tulsidas says: “Blessed be the pious soul who drinks uninterruptedly the nectar of Sri Rama’s name, which has been churned out of the ocean of the Vedas, removes the impurities of Kali Yuga, lives constantly on the tongue of Shiva, is a sovereign remedy and unfailing cure for the disease of worldly existence, and is life itself to Mother Janaki.

“The name is even superior to God because the formless aspect of Brahman as well as Brahman with form are tasted and realized by the power of the name. Sri Rama delivered a single soul, Ahalya, whereas His name has purified crores of wicked people.

“The two sweet and fascinating letters, ‘Ra’ and ‘Ma’ are like the two eyes of the alphabet and the life-breath of

devotees. They are easy to remember and delightful to all. They are beneficial in this world and sustain us in the other world.”

Vyasa said: “How amazing is the perversity of misguided people inhabiting this globe, that they do not remember the name of Sri Rama, which has the power to liberate them from the unceasing round of births and deaths! The utterance of this name does not involve any exertion; it rings supremely sweet and melodious to the ear. Even then, misguided people do not take to its remembrance. Freedom from births and deaths, which is extremely difficult for us mortals to attain, is easily obtained through the utterance of the name of Sri Rama.

“I declare solemnly, again and again, that a person engaged in the loving remembrance of Sri Rama’s name, never comes to grief. Those who seek to destroy sins accumulated through crores of births, or to possess untold riches and power in this world, should constantly, lovingly and devoutly remember the sweet name of Sri Rama. Is there anything more important for a man to do than to repeat this name?”



2

Restraint and Graceful Action

The sixth form of bhakti yoga is giving oneself a focus and fulfilling one's human dharma by performing the appropriate action in a graceful manner. In yoga the idea of restraint does not mean to hold back but to give purpose, direction, motivation and clarity to whatever one does.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

SAMYAM AND DAMA

What is samyam?

Swami Niranjanananda: Samyam means becoming an observer and master of one's actions, behaviour, speech and thoughts. Samyam is total awareness, dominance, control, harmony, balance and equilibrium.

Why is samyam important in bhakti yoga and how can it be achieved?

Swami Niranjanananda: Samyam, the sixth sadhana of bhakti, has been identified as self-control or restraint, yet there is another definition. Samyam comes from the root *yama*, meaning 'to hold', so *samyam* means 'to hold together'. With samyam, the entire personality is brought to a state of interactive harmony. The mind is in harmony

with the emotions, the emotions are in harmony with the environment, the body is in harmony with the mind. Physical, mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual harmony is the ultimate samyam.

Samyam has to begin from the outer dimension and move inwards. It starts with control of the senses, *indriya samyam*. Then comes *vani samyam*, control of speech. Mental diarrhoea is released through the mouth. For *vani samyam*, restraint and regulation of speech, *mouna sadhana*, the sadhana of silence, is prescribed. For *indriya samyam*, regulation of the senses, meditation is prescribed.

Practising a musical instrument for half an hour a day is not as valid a form of meditation as sitting in complete silence. No music can beat the state of silence. If one moves into the state of silence, one hears one's own inner music, however, as long as the outer music is playing, one cannot hear one's inner music.

How can restraint be defined?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga is known as restrained expression. When one is not restrained it means that one's actions are not clearly guided and do not really have a purpose. Knowledgeable, considered action is where one restrains the usual tendencies of the mind, focuses upon one thing and fulfils it. Therefore, the sixth form of bhakti is modesty and gracefulness, which is an outer expression in life where one is living and expressing one's human dharma.

What are the various levels of samyam?

Swami Niranjanananda: Samyam is observing the sensorial distractions and dissipations of the mind, and maintaining balance, harmony and transcendence. No matter what area of life one is involved in, there is samyam: one-pointedness, understanding, awareness of one's identification with the inner self, the higher Self. The more one is in samyam, the more finely tuned one is with that transcendental frequency and harmony. Samyam is like tightening the strings of a

guitar to tune them. When the senses run here and there, one has to control and guide them. When the mind runs here and there seeking pleasure, one has to tighten it.

Sensory control, speech control, mental control and emotional control are the four levels of samyam. Samyam is complete domination over the mental expressions and behaviour. The individual is deciding how the mind is to function, not the mind deciding how the individual is to act. This is mastery of samyam. The mind always remains a major factor in one's dealings with life, with the environment and even with the Divine. Therefore, the mind has to be guided and directed. Samyam is the process by which the mind can be pacified. This aspect of bhakti yoga involves self-control and cultivation of positive virtues and qualities, which also involves one-pointedness. With samyam, appropriate conduct happens naturally and spontaneously.

What are the benefits of mouna, the practice of silence?

Swami Niranjanananda: Mouna sadhana allows one to measure and be aware of the activity going on in the mind. *Mouna* means silence and comes from the root meaning 'to measure'. Mouna helps one to measure and regulate speech and thoughts. When people are silent, they begin to observe their own selves, their thoughts and feelings. If they are in a good frame of mind, they will do justice to that experience; if they are in a bad frame of mind, the observation will not change anything. When their observations begin to help them, they will find that their thoughts, ideas and expressions become much clearer and no longer confused. They will be more focused and their words will have power. Silence fills everyone with happiness and has its own attraction and power.

What is the difference between the eastern and western understanding of samyam?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is the difference between the western mindset and the eastern mindset. The western

mind is outside and everything is done outside. The eastern mind is inside, knowing what is right and what has to be done.

There is a big difference in understanding something from a western perspective and from an eastern perspective. In the western perspective, people are too involved in ‘Should I and should I not?’ That is their main confusion and thought. Eastern people are thinking, ‘Which is a better way? Dharmic or adharmic? The appropriate or inappropriate way?’ That is the basic difference which separates the western mentality with eastern mentality. Yoga is eastern science; it is not a western philosophy. Confusion happens when one is trying to bring out a mental experience into a sensorial experience and dimension. When one wants to bring out a mental understanding into a sensorial dimension, then problems will always happen. However, to look at the root of things is the trick that makes a human being successful in life; not a yogi, not a householder, a human being. It is applicable to everyone.

How does samyam evolve?

Swami Niranjanananda: Holding the total self in one’s hand is samyam. There is no equivalent word in English, the closest is restraint. According to the *Yoga Sutras*, samyam begins with pratyahara. Samyam is nurtured in dharana, and samyam flowers in dhyana. The moment one begins to disassociate and disconnect the senses from sense objects, one begins to observe. This is the beginning of samyam – pratyahara. Going through this observation and holding oneself in a balanced state of equipoise will lead to dhyana and modify the external code of conduct and behaviour.

How does Sri Krishna describe the balanced state of mind of a bhakta?

Swami Sivananda: In Chapter 12 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna describes the qualities that a true devotee possesses. He neither attaches himself to anything nor does he have

any aversion to things. He has a balanced mind under all circumstances. He is not agitated by the happenings of the world, nor does he himself cause any agitation in others. He is perfectly desireless and rejoices in the Divine within. He sees equality everywhere, being untouched by sorrow, fear, honour and dishonour. He is perfectly content as he has surrendered his entire being to the Divine.

The devotee is neither elated by praise nor pained by censure. He keeps a balanced state of mind. He has controlled the organ of speech and so he is silent. His mind is serene and silent as he has controlled the thoughts also. He is quite content with the bare means of bodily sustenance. Contentment ever dwells in the heart of the devotee. Like the ocean which is ever full, his heart is ever full as he has no cravings. He is ever joyful and joyous. He never grumbles, complains or murmurs when he does not obtain food and clothing.

Those who are free from likes and dislikes, attraction and repulsion, can possess equanimity. Those who are neither elated nor troubled when they obtain desirable or undesirable objects can possess evenness of mind.

The bhakta does not rejoice when he attains desirable objects nor does he grieve when he parts with his cherished objects, and he does not desire the unattained. The ordinary person of the world is ruled by the pairs of opposites, honour and dishonour, cold and heat, pleasure and pain. A yogi, a sage or a devotee has a balanced mind. He has poise or equanimity and is not at all swayed by the blind forces of attraction and repulsion.

SRI BHARAT

Sri Rama incarnated in the Treta Yuga, and his three brothers were considered to be his *vyuhavatars* or the embodiments of his energy. Bharat was so named because he looked after the needs of the world, *bharat poshan*. The world is upheld by dharma and it functions only due to dharma. Bharat followed dharma implicitly and upheld its principles throughout his life.

From early childhood, he was devoted to Sri Rama. He delighted in the pleasure of Sri Rama and desired nothing for himself. Full of respect towards Rama, his whole life was dedicated towards the service of Rama. When he heard about mother Kaikeyi's harsh order to banish Sri Rama to the forest for fourteen years so that Bharat could ascend the throne, he was distraught and rebuked his mother. Being full of compassion, he could not bear to see anyone in trouble. He rescued Manthara from Shatrughna's wrath even though it was on her instigation that Sri Rama had been exiled.

After performing his father Dasharatha's last rites, Bharat went into the forest in search of Sri Rama and implored him to return to the palace. When Sri Rama refused and said that he was duty bound to live out the full period of the exile, Bharat was heartbroken and returned to the kingdom. He ruled with the necessary care yet was never swayed by the wealth, throne and power of ruling Ayodhya.

Thinking of the hardships that Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshman were undergoing in the forest, he denied himself all comforts, eating only roots and fruits, fasting on most days and even slept on the bare ground. Though he had horses, chariots and elephants, Bharat always went everywhere on foot. The description of Bharat's love, dedication and devotion to Sri Rama abound in the Ayodhyakand portions of the *Ramacharitamanas*. There is an instance when Bharat reaches Chitrakoot. When he sees Sri Rama's footprints on the forest floor his happiness knows no bounds for he is sure that he will meet Rama soon.

When Sri Rama turned down Bharat's request to return to the throne in Ayodhya, Bharat begs for Sri Rama's paduka which he then places on the throne and rules in Rama's name alone.

Though he ruled the kingdom, he did not stay in the palace but chose to build a small hut with only kusha grass mats for furnishings in the village of Nandigram. Bharat spent fourteen years like this in tapasya and did not lie down to rest but only allowed himself to be seated. His resolve was unshakeable and it was thus that he spent the years awaiting Sri Rama's return.

Sri Rama was always aware of his brother Bharat's nature and told Vibhishana that it would take centuries before one could find anyone to match Bharat's devotion. That was also the reason that Sri Rama sent Hanuman to seek out Bharat first and inform him of their imminent return to Ayodhya. Before the Pushpak landed in Ayodhya, Sri Rama saw Bharat, worn thin with his tapasya and his hair matted. Bearing Sri Rama's paduka on his head Bharat came rushing to meet his beloved Sri Rama.

When they met, Sri Rama enfolded him in a warm embrace and they remained inseparable after that. Bharat was eternally devoted to the service of Sri Rama and was never far from him.

How does the *Bhagavad Gita* describe samyam?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the *Bhagavad Gita* there is an interesting statement by Sri Krishna, in the twelfth chapter, where he is defining what type of individual is dear to him, what type of individual is dear to God. It is easy to say that all people are sons and daughters of God. It is easy to philosophize that father loves everybody equally, however, that is not the reality. God does not love everyone equally, nor does one's own father. A parent likes that child who is in tune with the parent's mind, and the parent will not like that child who opposes the parent's mind. Parents are happy when the child understands, accepts and acts according to what they had wished for the child. They are disappointed, dejected, irritated, angry, when the child disobeys.

If the human is a reflection of the Divine, then the Divine is also reflecting the same like and dislike, in relation to the purity of self. If there is like, there is acceptance in God's mind. If there is dislike, there is an effort to improve so that that person can also come closer. In like there is acceptance, and in dislike there is an effort to improve the person. Both ways the individual is winning. In front of God, sinner and saint are philosophically equal in the eyes of God, yet realistically, God will gravitate more towards the saint and be more wary of the sinner.

In the twelfth chapter, when Arjuna asks the question, "What type of person does God like the most?" Sri Krishna answers in the last eight slokas, which define the traits, characters and qualities of a person who is dear to 'Lord Almighty'. These qualities reflect the aspirant transcending what makes him connect with the world of senses and sense objects, and establishing himself in a more positive and purer identity of himself. From the perspective of the *Bhagavad Gita*, finding this balance and equipoise is samyam, which is reflected in everything; when one is unaffected by anything that the world can throw at one, whether it be maya, passions, or desires, one is able to maintain equipoise and do the right thing, in the right manner, at the right time and with the right understanding.

What is sama and dama?

Swami Sivananda: Sama is calmness of mind induced by the eradication of *vasanas* or desires. If a desire arises in the mind, do not give way to it. This will become the practice of sama. Sama is keeping the mind in the heart by sadhana. It is restraint of the mind by not allowing it to externalize or objectify.

The restraint of the external activities and the indriyas is the practice of dama. If one renounces the desire for eating mangoes, it is sama. If one does not allow the feet to carry one to the bazaar to purchase the mangoes, if one does not allow the eyes to see the mangoes and if one does not allow the tongue to taste them, it is dama.

Sama is an internal restraint. Dama is a restraint of the indriyas. The practice of sama includes the practice of dama. The indriyas do not move and work without the help of the mind, therefore the practice of dama is necessary. The practice of dama should go hand in hand with sama. Sama alone will not suffice. One must attack the enemy, known as desire, from within and without. Then the mind will be in perfect control. *Uparati* or calmness of mind comes through the practice of sama and dama.

What is the secret to inner peace?

Swami Satyananda: Inner peace is a balanced vision of life. It is not subject to achievements and losses. Inner peace is an understanding of everything in life. External life is full of ups and downs, and for a weak person it sometimes becomes tiring and exhausting. For a strong person, every ascent is a joy and every descent is a game.

This life must therefore be lived. Inner peace comes when one accepts whatever happens, and everything in life becomes impersonal. That is the secret. Peace of mind is not the ultimate state. The ultimate is to realize one's real being, the supreme consciousness. Inner peace or happiness is only a means to an end.

What is the way to happiness?

Swami Sivananda: The first step is to reflect upon oneself, one's surroundings and actions. Before one acts one must stop to think. When a person earnestly attends to what he recognizes as his duties, he will progress and in consequence his comfort and prosperity will increase. His pleasures will be more refined. His happiness, enjoyments and recreations will be better and nobler.

Happiness is like a shadow – if pursued it will flee, but if one does not trouble oneself about it and strictly attends to one's duties, pleasures of the best and noblest kind will crop out everywhere on the path. If one does not anxiously pursue it, happiness will follow. One should apply oneself

diligently to daily duties and consult the scriptures and saints whenever one is in doubt. When one builds up a character it will give one success in life. This can be done by removing old negative habits and establish virtuous, healthy habits every day.

What are the three aspects of samyam?

Swami Niranjanananda: In order to strengthen samyam, three aspects have to be identified: the *drashta* aspect, observation; the *viveka* aspect, discrimination; and the *dharma* aspect, knowing the appropriate response. Without these three aspects samyam cannot be attained.

Effort has to be made to remain aware. There is no continuity of awareness as one's awareness is always fragmented. An effort has to be made to maintain that awareness. Effort comes first to maintain that awareness. Awareness does not come just because the eyes are open; awareness comes when consciousness is cognizing something.

What is the highest virtue?

Swami Satyananda: A saint is one who has devoted and dedicated his whole life to those who have nobody. The same thing is said about God: "God is there for the one who has no one." That is why He is also referred to as *dinanatha*, *dinabandhu*, *dinadayal* – protector of the poor, friend of the poor, one who shows mercy to the poor.

If everyone who has the means follows the principle of paying their social debt, then they will not have to feel insecure about their money and money will never raise problems for them. Money creates problems when it is spent only on oneself. When one spends money only on oneself, when one indulges, that is when money becomes troublesome. While austerity is a virtue, the misery of poverty is also extremely difficult to bear; it is a curse. Wealth is a terrible curse, yet it is also the ultimate boon.

When one repays one's debt by looking after the sector of society which is handicapped, one is a *mahapurusha*, a

great man. One's personal life is of no consequence. Those who are good are good only for themselves. What have they done for society? What have they done for the poor? What have they done for the blind? What have they done for lepers? What have they done for the lame? The goodness in man does not reach others until it is put to use in a concrete, practical form. The best form of goodness, or the greatest virtue, is working for the welfare of others; this is the biggest *dharma* or duty of this age. The *Ramacharitamanas*, the Vedas, the Puranas, the scriptures, the Bible, the Koran, all say that doing good for others is the biggest virtue.

Eating vegetarian or non-vegetarian food affects body and nature, but it does not affect your spiritual progress. Which is better, eating fruit and robbing people all your life, or being a meat-eater and serving the poor? Only one who performs good deeds is better. A man could be a drunkard, a meat-eater, a womanizer, it does not matter. The world only sees how he has improved the lives of so many, and this is what is necessary.

ANANDAMAYI MA

Who was Anandamayi Ma?

Swami Satyananda: I met Anandamayi Ma when I was ten years old, and she gave me a lot of spiritual encouragement. She was one of the greatest lady saints of India. Although she was young, she radiated spiritual energy, bliss and tranquillity. When she patted my back, her whole body emanated something which gave me a wonderful experience. This lasted for many months, but slowly it wore off, leaving only a memory.

She was born in that part of India which is now known as Bangladesh, and right from her childhood she lived a life of spiritual ecstasy. During her life she inspired millions of people to the path of bhakti. Her mantra was, 'The talks of God alone are talks, everything else is painful'.

She had one ashram in the same town where I was born and she used to visit that place once or twice a year. Indian people are religious and follow the *bhakti marga*, the path of bhakti, by temperament. Indian people will always go, whenever they hear about a saint or some divine discourses. In India before a real saint, before a real sadhu, the richest and the poorest, the king and the subject, do not have any kind of distinction.

Very few people know in the West that in India a saint or guru is considered above God, not below God. In the presence of a real sadhu, or a God-realized saint, whether a Muslim or a prostitute, a Christian, or a meat-eater, or a great leader, or a king – whosoever comes – they are considered equal, and they have to behave as if they were equal. Anandamayi Ma was one among them. Wherever she went, whether it was Mr Nehru or a scavenger on the streets, they used to sit before her, side by side. She was respected by every section of society – the political, the intellectual, the mercantile and the working class. She never discussed religion, but she always spoke with every breath about God.

I also think that religion and God are two different things, not the same thing. God has to do with the heart of the devotee and not with the sanctum sanctorum. The heart of a devotee, the heart of a true devotee, is the moving temple of God, and the sanctum sanctorum is the dead house of God. It is not bad to go to the sanctum sanctorum, but one should remember that if there is anyone among us who lives with God in his heart, he is the true temple.

Wherever Anandamayi Ma went, thousands and thousands of poor and rich people went to have her darshan. There is another belief among Hindus that real saints do not need publicity. Do people blow a conch before the sun rises? In the same way, when some good publicity takes place about a swami or a sadhu, Indian people become alert and cautious. Those who aspire to spiritual life, those who want to lead a higher life, they will have to find things for themselves without reading the publicity material.

Nowadays one sees in television commercials, this soap, that cleaner, a lot of advertisements. A God-realized saint should not be treated like that.

Anandamayi Ma lived always in trance, in ecstasy, and therefore wherever she went, her arrival was never trumpeted. By evening time, one would find thousands of people crowding her apartment, wherever she lived. Wherever she lived, in whichever house she lived, they made it a temple. She spoke very little, very little, but by the glance of her eyes, her devotees used to receive a comforting message, solace, and the reply to what they had come for. Anandamayi means ‘full of bliss’ and Ma means ‘mother’.

How did Anandamayi Ma live a life of dedication?

Swami Niranjanananda: The life of Nirmala Sundari, ‘immaculate beauty’, later known as Anandamayi Ma, ‘blissful mother’, abounded with psychic and mystical phenomena of every kind. She was renowned, however, not so much for such phenomena as for her ceaselessly happy and tranquil state and the motherly graciousness with which she received the thousands upon thousands who sought her blessings.

Born with the same realization that she enjoyed as an adult, she was married at the age of twelve to a little-educated brahmin like herself, whom she later renamed Bholanath. When her husband approached her to consummate their marriage, he received such a terrific electric shock that he never did it again. From that day he vowed to be her spiritual disciple and the couple remained celibate throughout their marriage.

During her twenties she took up yoga sadhana and spontaneously displayed a great array of mudras and kriyas of which she had no previous knowledge in this life. Various mantras and Sanskrit compositions poured from her mouth. These experiences led her to a more complete knowledge of her spiritual unity, and after this she began to attract a small following. At first she was not eager to function as a guru, and she would only see people because her husband

intervened on their behalf. Under his direction she began to mix more freely with those who came to her for healing, guidance and spiritual inspiration. During these years, extraordinary ecstasies began to manifest regularly in which her entire body would be utterly possessed by a divine force.

When her devotees constructed their first ashram, she was not particularly pleased, saying that the whole world is an ashram, so what need had they of a special place of their own? When the ashram was completed, rather than settle herself there, her divine inspiration moved her to travel, which she continued to do until her death at the age of eighty-seven. As a result of her wanderings, twenty-five ashrams were eventually established. However, she never considered any of them to be hers. She travelled continuously without plans or possessions, and those who wished to accompany her had to do the same. Although the ashrams were established by strict Brahmins, along traditional lines, she herself never conformed to caste rules. She touched and fed members of all castes.

Most of the people who came to her sought her blessings, her healing power, her advice and her sympathy, which she gave endlessly, with patience and compassion. Serving and enlightening humanity, she made herself available to devotees every day of the year without caring for her own privacy. Although she was never formally initiated into sannyasa, throughout her life she demonstrated the qualities of total dedication and self-abnegation.

DHARMA

How can dharma be defined?

Swami Sivananda: The Sanskrit term dharma is generally translated as duty or righteousness. Any action that brings *shreya*, liberation, and *abhyudaya*, exaltation, is dharma. That which brings wellbeing to human beings is dharma. The word dharma comes from the root *dhri*, which means 'to support or to hold on'. Therefore, that which upholds is

dharma. By dharma people are upheld. The mark of dharma is *achara*, good conduct, from which dharma is born. *Achara* is the highest dharma, and *swadharma* means 'one's own duty in accordance with the order of life'.

What are the responsibilities of dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Human beings are responsible for the growth of their own nature and personality, for developing the beauty inherent within them, and for becoming better people. These are the responsibilities of dharma.

What is dharma?

Swami Satyananda: Religion has a simple definition: the relationship between God and His devotee, the relationship between God and His creatures. Whatever relationship one may have, that is dharma. God takes care of us; that is His dharma. I remember God; this is my dharma, and by God's grace, may I follow my dharma. This is the ultimate definition of religion. Whether to cremate or to burn somebody, to conduct a marriage in this way or that, to light a candle or a deepak, is a matter of custom or tradition. Only the relationship between God and devotee is dharma, or religion.

As long as one does not realize one's real *swaroopa*, or form, one will not experience the supreme bliss which is one's personal property. This is the first and foremost duty or dharma. Religion does not depend on the family in which one is born or the country where one takes birth and dies. Dharma is not religion, sect or *sampradaya*, tradition. Dharma is unity with God. One may belong to any cult, sect or religion, but that is like having clothes with nobody inside. The body inside is the effort to attain unity with God. The world recognizes dharma, not adharma. It is the saints who are always remembered and who become great, renowned and respected.

Greatness does not lie in how many cars one has, how many factories one runs, or how many palatial homes one may possess. True greatness depends on what one has given

to the world. One's greatness is one's contribution to the world, and in order to contribute properly one must have peace. However, one will have to douse the fire of desire, ill-will, criticism and negativity in order to obtain peace. The message received from the life of Guru Nanak is that one should remove hypocrisy and become established in dharma.

Most people live within the three gunas. It is possible to manage the gunas by living according to dharma. Dharma is an attitude, it is effort, it is day-to-day life, it is the interaction between people, between individuals and society, husband and wife, friends and enemies. A dharmic life begins with life itself, just as bhakti begins with emotion. The three gunas have to be managed through dharma. Just as one throws away rubbish, cleans the sheets and cobwebs, one has to work with the gunas too. The gunas exist in one's house as well – the objects of purity, enjoyment and disposal represent the gunas. The way one manages them is the way one needs to manage one's heart.

What are the components inherent in dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Dharma is generally defined in English as duty, commitment or obligation, however the real meaning of dharma is an attitude, a mentality, a lifestyle which one is able to maintain and which helps to uplift one's life. Dharma means doing what is appropriate and is guided by wisdom. There are three major components of dharma: appropriate thinking, appropriate behaviour and appropriate action.

What are some aspects of dharma?

Swami Satyananda: Dharma means those actions which are in accordance with one's mental and physical makeup. It implies actions which come naturally to an individual and lead to harmony within the whole framework of the world. It can be roughly, though inadequately, translated as 'duty'. Dharma is not a subject that can be discussed in depth in general terms as the dharma of each individual is different.

What are elements of right or dharmic conduct?

Swami Sivananda: Spiritual life is not a light matter. The aspirant should always regard himself as a beginner, just commencing a sadhana. Self-realization and dharma, or righteousness, are inseparable. A person evolves through the practice of dharma according to the situation in life, and eventually attains self-realization, the ultimate goal.

Sadachara or right conduct is the foundation of yoga. Yoga is rooted in virtue. One should be well established in sadachara right from the beginning of one's spiritual life. Right conduct is superior to all branches of knowledge and the root of all prosperity. It is conduct that begets virtue, and it is virtue that prolongs life.

A person of right conduct has ideals, principles and mottoes. He strictly follows them, removes his weaknesses and defects, develops good conduct and becomes a sattwic individual. He is careful in behaving with his elders, parents, teachers, acharyas, sisters, brothers, friends, relatives and strangers. He attempts to know what is right and wrong, by approaching the wise and the saintly and studying the scriptures carefully, and then treads the path of dharma.

What is the most important aspect of dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhakti is manifesting in one's life the qualities which are divine and human while following one's dharma. I think that this is the most important aspect of bhakti. Generally, when people live a quality in their lives, they tend to isolate themselves from the dharma belonging to the realm of the body, the realm of the mind and emotions, and also from the dharma governing the spiritual dimension.

Sri Krishna had the ability to live life according to the dharma. Mythological or historical, whatever the story may be, whatever his lifestyle was, whether he was a crook or a saint, his whole life process was lived according to dharma. In this process he had to adopt many roles, yet he was never caught up in any one role. He was a warrior, yet he did not have

animosity for anyone. He was a lover, yet he was not attached to anyone. He was a player, a friend, yet friendships did not interfere with his pursuit of the dharma. He always had a clear vision and lived life according to the dharma of the moment.

It sounds easy, but people find it difficult to combine the principles of spirituality and awareness with the normal, external environment and lifestyle. At times the thought comes into their minds, “I am going into isolation, to an ashram, to a guru, to a mountain, into solitude. I want my space.” It is alright to look for one’s space no doubt, and to have time off, but why have that rejection, that repulsion for the environment or for certain situations? Instead of feeling that rejection and repulsion inside, instead of identifying with a personal desire, one should live life from moment to moment by accepting situations as they come up, and follow one’s dharma accordingly. Awareness of dharma and living according to dharma must happen once one is able to live with qualities which are spiritual, transcendental, unconditioned, human and divine.

Can you explain the different meanings of dharma? In the *Bhagavad Gita* everyone is told to follow his or her own religion or dharma.

Swami Satyananda: In this context the meaning of dharma is not religion, but the natural trait or characteristic. The dharma of fire is to burn, of water to flow. In the language of chemistry, dharma is the property. In Sanskrit, the natural property is called dharma. The dharma of the eyes is to see. The mind, senses and heart have their own dharma. Human beings depend totally on the dharma of the body, senses, mind and heart, but these are not really dependable. The only dependable thing is God Himself and nothing less. Therefore, if one wants to surrender or seek help from someone or if one needs a dependable friend, one should turn to God alone. The senses are not one’s dharma.

The meaning of *swadharma* is one’s duty towards others, towards life. Swadharma does not mean religion. The

Bhagavad Gita does not talk about religion. It does not speak about dharma in the sense of Hindu, Vaishnava, Shaiva, Buddhist or vedic dharma. The word 'dharma' is not used in this context. It is used purely scientifically and does not mean religion at all. It means the natural property, duty and right conduct. That is the scientific meaning of dharma. It does not mean a religion like Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Judaism or Zoroastrianism. They are known as *sampradaya*, sects or traditions, not as dharma.

How can one know one's dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: According to the laws of dharma, there is no scope for either feeling or rationality. Dharma is purely an understanding of the natural interaction and the natural law that governs the individual, society, the world and the cosmos. Dharma is knowing the potential that exists in each and every dimension of this creation, and not only is it cognition of that potential, it is also living according to the appropriate conditions. In one word, dharma is appropriateness.

Some people say dharma is duty. Some say dharma is religion. Some say dharma is the natural law. However, dharma, in spirit, represents three main functions: appropriate action, appropriate behaviour and appropriate thinking. As long as one's thoughts, behaviour and actions are appropriate to the situations and circumstances, one is on the right track.

Dharma entails understanding. Dharma is not a reactive response to circumstance; it is the appropriate response which develops after one has understood and is in control of that particular situation, whether it be personal, social or global. If there is proper understanding of the situation then dharma is natural and spontaneous. If there is no understanding of the situation, then there is a headache trying to figure out what one's dharma is. Asking, "Should I do this? Should I not do that?" is confusion. Therefore, natural and spontaneous expression is dharma.

If one's child falls down and is hurt, what would a mother's response be? Would she think, "Shall I pick up my child or not?" or would she act spontaneously to help the child? If she acts spontaneously, believing in something, that will be dharma. If she acts according to some intellectual process, she will never find the answer to what dharma is and further confusion will be created.

Dharma cannot be rationalized. In order to live dharma one needs to act as one would to protect one's child, with that awareness and clarity. If the mind is clear, there is dharma. If there is no understanding, there is no dharma.

How can one live one's dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Dharma is the responsibility inherent in every interaction, the inherent commitment that an individual feels when relating to everything outside. This creative expression of dharma makes one free from mental and emotional strife.

One has to observe the reactions, responses, interactions and communications and be aware of each and every word that one says before it is spoken. One has to cultivate this awareness, realize one's interaction with the world, other people and society, and regulate this behaviour. Regulating one's behaviour is following dharma. Irregular, eccentric behaviour is not dharma. When the expressions are regulated, whether through the senses, mind, emotions or intellect, they bring peace. They do not distract or divert the attention into many areas.

What maxim does Sage Vyasa give to the aspirant?

Swami Sivananda: An aspirant went to Veda Vyasa and said, "O Maharishi, I am in a dilemma. I cannot properly comprehend the right significance of the term dharma. Some say it is right conduct. Others say that which leads to moksha and happiness is dharma. Anything, any action that brings one down is adharma. I am bewildered. Kindly give me an easy definition of dharma to enable me to follow dharma in all my actions."

Maharishi Vyasa replied, “O aspirant! Hear me. I shall suggest an easy method. Always remember the following sayings with great care when you perform any action: ‘Do as you would be done by. Do unto others as you wish others to do unto you.’ This is the whole of dharma. Attend to this carefully. You will be saved from all troubles. If you follow these wise maxims, you can never give any pain to others. Practise this in your daily life. Even if you fail one hundred times, it does not matter. Persevere and you will succeed in the attainment of the goal.”

This is a good maxim. The whole gist is here. If one practises this carefully one will not commit any wrong act.

What is the true meaning of dharma?

Swami Satyananda: Dharma is not concerned with God. Dharma talks about man’s duties. The meaning of dharma is: *Yato abhyudaya* – ‘That which uplifts you, that which gives you happiness.’ Your dharma is not to fight with your wife, to look after and bring up your children, serve your parents. Do not kill, do not steal, do not drink alcohol, isn’t this dharma? *Acharya prabhavo dharmaha* – ‘Conduct and thought itself is dharma.’

When God comes into dharma, it would be better to call it bhakti or spirituality instead of dharma. If someone wears a tika on the forehead, people say, “Oh, he is very religious, very dharmic.” Do not call him dharmic, call him a bhakta. To believe in God is bhakti and spirituality. However, even if one does not believe in God, but instead fulfils the duties of one’s station in life as son, father, husband or servant, then that is dharma. In the *Ramacharitamanas* (Uttarakand, after doha 40, chau 1) it has been said:

*Para hita sarisa dharma nahi bhaaee,
Para peedaa sama nahi adhamaaee.*

There is no dharma superior to doing good to others,
And no meanness worse than troubling others.

How can one have an understanding and knowledge of dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Dharma is a part and parcel of life. It means having conscious knowledge of the obligations which lead to the constructive expression of one's nature. Obligation is seen in terms of knowledge of one's duty and how one has to act in any given situation. This knowledge is known as dharma, and the definition of dharma according to the tradition is a quality which one imbibes and expresses. It is a state of mind and being in which one is able to express oneself creatively and competently and which is beneficial to all concerned. In this context, dharma can also mean perfection in action.

Dharma can also mean being balanced in thought, or having a discriminating nature. Knowing what is right and what is wrong and acting accordingly is known as *viveka*. Another component of dharma is being established in one quality of life. Dharma can mean many things, it does not have just one meaning. In order to understand what dharma is, one will have to understand the totality of life.

The concept of dharma today is a derogatory one. Some people even say dharma is a religion, but it is not. Dharma is the totality of constructive expression which assists one's process of growth and the process of social, global and universal growth.

If one wants to practise dharma, one should begin with karma yoga and then move into bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga generates universal, unconditioned love, not conditioned and selfish love. Finally, one moves to jnana yoga. These three stages lead to yogic perfection which will take one to the knowledge of dharma.

What is the basis of dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Dharma has three supporting principles: good thoughts, good behaviour and good actions. They give life a goal and a direction. They provide a goal for one's actions and a direction to one's thoughts.

What is Sri Krishna's advice to Arjuna in relation to karma and dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sri Krishna says to Arjuna, "Divert your action from negative to positive, from restrictive to expansive, by surrendering everything and fixing your mind in the spiritual essence of your being. Surrender everything to Me."

This is the stage of Ishwara pranidhana in which one says, "I am not responsible for my karma, I am doing it as my *kartavya dharma*, my natural duty." The understanding of dharma has to be based on proper knowledge of the virtuous, auspicious, uplifting nature of every situation, circumstance, thought and action. That is how one has to live.

RAJA SHIBI – THE LOVING SHELTER OF ALL WHO SEEK REFUGE

One day, the son of Ushinasa, Raja Shibi, was performing a yajna. The tales of his immense mercifulness and his devotion to God had even reached the heavens. Indra decided to test Raja Shibi and came to the king in the form of a hawk. Agnideva came as a pigeon. Trembling from fear of being caught by the hawk, the pigeon flew into the lap of the king and sought refuge in his clothes. Just then the hawk appeared and began to speak to the king in a human voice, "O King! You are said to be foremost among the upholders of dharma, but why are you acting against dharma today? You have won over debtors with wealth, lies with truth, cruelty with kind acts – you even do good to those who wish you ill-will. I am beside myself with hunger and have been fortunate to find this pigeon as food. Why are you going against dharma and depriving me of my sustenance?"

The pigeon pleaded piteously to the king, "O King! I have sought refuge in you from this hawk who will kill me. Please save me from certain death." Raja Shibi, the merciful king, said to the

hawk, "One who is capable but does not protect the weak out of fear, greed or revulsion and abandons them commits a great sin. Everyone is afraid of death and dying. One should be able to empathize with the suffering of others and help them. I cannot give up this pigeon to you, it has sought my protection. Tell me how else I can remedy your situation."

The hawk replied that if one stands in the way of another's dharma, it goes against all dharma. The hawk was starving and if he died his children would also starve to death. In saving the pigeon, the king would be responsible for the death of many others. He asked the king to assess the facts and make the right decision: was it right to protect one at the cost of many other lives?

Raja Shibi said that the protection of those who are frightened for their lives is the highest dharma. Many do good and give charity for fame and glory, but few work selflessly for the good of others. He offered his whole kingdom and even his own life to the hawk but he refused to surrender the terrified pigeon to the hawk. Since it was food the hawk wanted, the king told him to ask for it in any other form. Being a carnivore, the hawk replied that his food was flesh. He suggested that if the king cut his own flesh equal to the weight of the pigeon, he would be satisfied.

Without another thought, the king called for a pair of weighing scales and placed the pigeon on one side. He began to cut his own body and place those pieces on the other side of the scales. No matter how much of his body he cut and placed on the scales, the weight of the pigeon kept on increasing. So he had to keep adding more and more. Finally he climbed onto the scales himself. When he did so, heavenly music began to play and flowers were showered from above.

Raja Shibi began to wonder about these strange happenings and birds who spoke in human voices. At that moment, Indra and Agnideva appeared before him in their divine forms. Indra said that Raja Shibi had never been envious of those in a better

condition than his, had never been rude to those lesser than him, nor had he competed with his equals. He had sacrificed his own life to protect the lives of others and he would surely attain the highest state. Indra blessed him with a long reign and the assurance that he would ascend to the heavens after he died.

How can one understand the concept of dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the Upanishads there is a story of the demons, the devas and the humans, who early on in creation realized they needed a mandate from their maker, God, about how to live. On their way to God, there was a great thunderstorm. In the sound of the thunder they thought they heard the voice of God giving them a mandate. The demon representative thought he heard the command, “Be compassionate.” The demons in today’s society are the terrorists who disrupt harmony and cause violence and suffering. The demons within every individual are *kama*, negative passion and self-oriented desire, *krodha*, anger, and *lobha*, greed. The message to be compassionate is the antidote to these demons, the antidote to tamas.

The nature of devas is sensuality, to love pleasure and enjoyment. The message they heard was “Learn restraint.” This is the antidote to rajas. The human nature is acquisitive, therefore the human representative heard the mandate “Give, share.” To develop sattwa, one has to transcend and transform the vritti of accumulation. Sharing increases sattwa and acquiring obscures sattwa. These are the three ideas given in the Upanishads to transform human nature.

These are the principles of dharma. Dharma is something which one holds and which uplifts, *dharitri*. What one holds in the hands for one’s upliftment is *satyam*, truth, *shuddhata*, purity, *karuna*, compassion, and *daan*, giving. These are the four walls of dharma in which one has to live, yet no one has ever lived in this house. The ceiling is transcendental consciousness, union with God, the

expression of divinity, underneath whose shelter one lives. There are two ways to live: to struggle, which represents ego, or to surrender and flow with life, 'Let Thy will be done'. Once one learns how to surrender, one will find that arrangements have been made. There is no ritual involved, just a realization that one is an instrument being played by a cosmic musician.

How does dharma relate to the higher and lower mind?

Swami Satyananda: There is a story in the *Mahabharata*. During the last phase of the war, Arjuna and his unknown half-brother, Karna, who was born to Arjuna's mother, Kunti, before her marriage, were fighting on the battlefield, each one for his army. Suddenly, Karna's chariot would not move because something was wrong with the wheels. When he stepped down to repair it, Arjuna stopped shooting. That is the dharma of a warrior: when a soldier has no weapons, no defences, he should not be killed.

At that moment, however, Sri Krishna asked Arjuna, "What are you doing?" Arjuna replied, "He has no weapon, so I cannot kill him now." Sri Krishna said, "What do you mean? Now is the time. Finish him. Kill him." Arjuna had to obey. Karna said, "This is not dharma. You know I have no weapon." Sri Krishna just laughed and said, "Yes, now you remember dharma, when the calamity falls on your head, but when the queen was being stripped naked in a public place, at that time did you remember dharma? When all of you conspired to burn the five brothers in the wax house, did you remember dharma?"

Karna did not know what to do. He could not repair his chariot. He stood up, fought and was killed. Sri Krishna said, "Practise dharma with those who practise dharma. There is no use in practising virtue with a person who does not want to practise it."

One should know when to use the forces of the higher mind and when to use the forces of the lower mind. When the higher mind does not know how to function, it is always

taken over by the lower mind. If the higher mind wants to exist in its own higher spheres and does not want to become subservient to the lower mind, it has to act in a certain manner. How it has to act is difficult to understand and many people do not know this. They are always carried away by their emotions, and the higher mind loses ground when it is under the sway of those dominant emotions.

With a saint one should behave like a saint, with one's mother one must behave like a daughter or son, with the wife or husband one must behave like a husband or wife. When a person is coming to one's house with a definite purpose to do some harm, one must behave with him accordingly and protect oneself. This is one's dharma.

What are the four stages of dharma?

Swami Niranjanananda: Dharma is a form of understanding the scope of human interaction with society, nature and the Divine. Ultimately, this is what matters in life. The other experiences – the pleasure, happiness, contentment, peace and bliss, or the suffering, pain, strife, disturbance and distress, are peripherals, temporary and transitory. Dharma is the continuous, eternal interaction between the individual, nature and the Divine.

Dharma is perceived as having four stages. The first stage of dharma is creating a personal code of conduct in the interactions with family, friends and society, and in relation to the interaction with the world of senses. A code of conduct has to be followed in order to derive the maximum benefit from these interactions. An interaction should not become the cause of a head-trip, headache, dissatisfaction or dissent in life. The first evolute of dharma is the code of conduct for the entire society. Establishing systems, regulations and disciplines which are personal, social, national and global in nature is the first component of dharma.

In the second stage of dharma the individual realizes the commitment any interaction involves and the participation it demands. The individual has to do justice to that. Realizing

the commitment one inherits through an interaction in life with friends, families and societies, and taking that commitment to its logical, positive conclusion for the benefit of all is the second stage. The first two stages are the external behaviours of dharma, creating external order, system, harmony and peace.

Stage three is personal transformation, which comes with the realization of one's nature and what one can do to become better, happier, more fulfilled, content, creative and selfless. This personal change is what makes an individual a human being. The mind dictates through thoughts, desires, aspirations and its own creation of needs. It dictates what an individual's behaviour has to be like in life. The dictates of the mind lead to a conditioned state of existence, which is recognized as a confined, restrictive, defined form, with less possibility of change. This state is known as *tamas*.

Tamas makes the focus go towards personal gratification and satisfaction. Sattwa makes the mind free from ambitions, desires, cravings and attachments. It brings freedom, peace and joy. Transformation takes place when a person moves from the state of *tamas* to a state of *sattwa* and becomes qualitatively better in thought, behaviour, performance, speech and living.

Until and unless this qualitative transformation happens, one cannot experience the transcendental nature and connect with the transcendental, divine power or cosmic power. The tamasic nature denies the existence of a cosmic power, and the sattvic nature enforces the existence of a cosmic power. For a person who is established in *sattwa*, material hypnosis has no meaning. One experiences the qualities of the spirit and not of matter. There has to be a shift from *tamas* to *sattwa*. Therefore, the third component of dharma is to make one a better, an enlightened individual.

The fourth stage of dharma is discovering the connection that one has with the supreme Self, the transcendental Self, the divine Self, or God. The reality is that a connection

happens between the individual and cosmic consciousness, and the fourth component of dharma is discovering the connection between an individual and the Divine. In this context, dharma is a tradition, a way of life, an understanding which applies knowledge in life.

What is dharma and swadharma?

Swami Sivananda: In order to evolve morally and spiritually certain important duties must be performed in the right manner. An aspirant must live according to the laws of God and know his duties. The duties which apply at a given time or stage in his growth are called swadharma. The aspirant can make progress in life only by knowing and performing his swadharma diligently.

People have duties to their parents and other family members, to society and the country. They have a duty to their own self and to God. They must fulfil these duties in life in order to progress and enjoy peace of mind. However, if swadharma is performed properly, it will take one towards God, which is the main purpose of this human birth. The foremost duty in life is to realize God, and anything that takes one away from God cannot be dharma.

How does following dharma bring one close to God?

Swami Niranjanananda: The focus of Krishna's life was the establishment of dharma. Dharma is identified as a *purushartha*, individual effort. Dharma is not a belief, a concept or a religion; dharma is action, effort. This action and effort should lead one to experiencing the divine nature that is dormant in every being. Krishna wanted to establish this concept of dharma right from the time he became self-aware.

In the festival of Ganga Dussehra, the women float candles or *deepaks*, little lamps, on the river as a form of worship. There is a story that when Krishna was young, he accompanied his mother, Yashoda, to the banks of the river to watch this ritual. When he saw people floating little

candles on the river, he entered the water himself and every time a deepak or candle floated by he would pick it up and put it on the riverbank.

When his mother asked him what he was doing, he replied, “Mother, all the candles that come near me I pick up and put on the shore. My little hands can’t reach the candles that are in midstream or near the other shore, yet any deepak that floats towards me I pick up and put on the shore.”

Deepaks represent the individual souls who are floating in this stream of *samsara*, worldly existence. Those who are too far away go unattended, but those souls which float towards the godly nature are immediately picked up and saved. Coming close to the proximity of the Divine is the purpose of dharma, nothing more.



3

Seeing Divinity in Everything

The seventh form of bhakti is the ability to see divinity in everything by realizing that the divine spark exists in every aspect of creation. The life in this body is an expression of God. The motion of the mind is an expression of God. The greenness in a leaf or a blade of grass, the liquidity of water, the warmth of fire, are expressions of God. Insects, inanimate objects, the elements – everything has its function and is fulfilling its role in the scheme of creation, which is being guided by the cosmic will. Realizing that the entire creation is an expression of the divine will and being able to perceive the transcendental nature in everything is the seventh aspect of bhakti yoga.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

WHAT IS ATMABHAVA?

What kind of love is atmabhava?

Swami Satyananda: A bhakta's life is an expression of love, whether it is directed towards a transcendental being or to the people around him. Love does not belong to a limited company. Love is infinite. Loving one person or even a number of people is limited love. It is attachment and attraction, *raga*, not love, but when one begins to love

everyone as one would love one's own kith and kin, one's own folks, then that is another form of love.

What is the aim of atmabhava in bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The seventh form of bhakti yoga is seeing the spark of life and divinity in each and everyone. There should be no distinction between one person and another. There should be no concept of high and low, yet there is identification. Just as one can identify with God somewhere there, one should be able to identify with God here, in you, in me, in every form of creation.

What is atmabhava?

Swami Satyananda: The word *atmabhava* means complete sympathy for others. It means feeling the pain and distress of others as if it were one's own, feeling the poverty, sickness and calamities of others as one's own. A person should be able to feel the pain of other people, to feel the tragedy in another's life. Before being able to experience Brahman or God, to see the light or experience enlightenment, one must be able to feel the pain and agony of another person. If one can't feel or respond to another's agony mentally, it means one cannot attain peace, one cannot see the light. Only a compassionate and sensitive heart which feels and responds to another's pain attains knowledge effortlessly. The more distant and unaffected one is from the suffering and distress of others, the further Brahman will be. God, Shiva, Rama, Devi will be beyond one's reach.

A person should be tender and sensitive towards the misery of others. The heart should immediately respond; compassion should flow. The heart should go out to all those in agony. Other people's sorrow and suffering should be experienced as one's own. Only such tender hearts can feel and experience the paramatma. Those who are unmoved and insensitive to the feelings of others are unworthy to be called human. They share the four instincts of food, sleep, sex and fear with the animals and their lives rotate

around them. People eat, procreate and are frightened, just like animals, so what is the difference between people and animals?

How can one make this world a paradise?

Swami Sivananda: Escape from the world is not the goal of life. Freedom from worldliness is what is desired. The devotee recognizes divinity in himself and recognizes divinity in all. This whole world is pervaded by God. God is a question of supply and demand. If there is sincere demand for God, the supply will come at once.

All life is one. The world is one home and we are members of one family. Creation is an organic whole, and no one is independent of that whole. People make themselves miserable by separating themselves from others. Separation is death, while unity is eternal life. The immortal essence is within all creatures. All life is sacred, and this world is a paradise of beauty, a haven of peace and tranquillity.

Is it easy or difficult to be a bhakta?

Swami Satyananda: The real concept of a great bhakta is to see God in all. When he sees God in all, he is beyond all kinds of experiences. It is a very high state. I have met some of these bhaktas, but personally I think that the path of bhakti is very difficult.

Is it really possible to live atmabhava?

Swami Satyananda: Yes, and there is an incident to illustrate it. The Great Indian Mutiny took place in 1857. Indian soldiers revolted against the British Government, which quickly took steps to quell the uprising. When people heard that British troops were advancing, whole villages were deserted in panic. At one place the fleeing villagers saw a sadhu coming their way. They warned him that the soldiers would kill him mercilessly if they saw him. But the sadhu paid no attention and continued on his journey. When the soldiers reached the village, one of them in blind fury

bayoneted the sadhu. He was fatally injured. As the soldier withdrew his bayonet, the sadhu whispered with his last dying breath, “And you also are He.” Even in the agony of death the sadhu saw his murderer as a form of divinity.

How did Sri Swami Satyananda explain atmabhava?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sri Swami Satyananda has given many sutras to cultivate atmabhava. It is not a philosophy; it is a practical application of a spiritual realization. He said, “If you believe that God exists in everyone, including yourself, then when you see a hungry person, recognize that God inside that person is hungry. God is not different from that person. When you see somebody suffering, recognize that God inside that person is suffering. God is not different from that person.”

If one can recognize the given condition of individuals and recognize that God is experiencing that condition through the individual, then atmabhava can be cultivated gradually. One will connect with that person, with one’s faith and conviction, with an inclination to help, support and uplift. This is a simple way of worshipping God. One does not have to chant mantras, one does not have to sit in front of a statue or photo and say, “God, God, God.” One should be looking at others and developing the ability to see that divinity within them, by sensing what they are experiencing. If they are suffering, know that God is suffering, and make the arrangements to make God happy. If God is hungry, he should be fed and the God within that person should be made happy. If the person is thirsty, he should be given something to drink and the God within that person should be made happy.

This is the cultivation of atmabhava which Sri Swami Satyananda speaks about, time and again, to remind everyone, “Lift yourself from this concept of duality, and connect with everyone.” Those who have controlled their senses are the ones able to transcend duality in life. Bhakti yoga is a path of progression and there is a sequence.

What is the foundation of bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Feeling for all creatures as one feels for oneself, *atmabhava*, is the foundation of bhakti. Sri Swami Satyananda says, “Awaken this feeling of cosmic unity.” Until one becomes sensitive towards all beings, one is not going to be able to achieve anything. One may wish to uplift society, yet one is not sensitive. People are sensitive only towards their own pocket. They might have a hundred dollars in their pocket, but they do not want to part with a cent. There is no sign of generosity in them.

It is not difficult to achieve *atmabhava*. It develops through following one’s duty, through love and generosity, and through experiencing the presence of the Divine. If something is misplaced in one’s house, one cannot disown responsibility for it. In the house, everyone is responsible: parents, grandparents or siblings. One cannot say someone else is responsible in one’s own home. No matter how many people live in the house, if something happens it becomes the responsibility of every person living there. This is due to *atmabhava*, empathy, a feeling of oneness. The moment one steps outside the home the responsibility is over. If anything is moved or misplaced outside of one’s own home it does not matter; there is no feeling of oneness in the mind.

The world and the relationships are limited only to the idea of ‘me and my family,’ and nothing beyond that. This is the only world. People are not concerned with the people beyond this boundary. They feel no relationship with them; they are all considered strangers. This tendency to remain connected with ‘me and mine’ is the selfish tendency. Therefore, one should end this selfishness and establish a connection with other people. When one cultivates a connection with other people, the self-centred, self-oriented tendency will diminish on its own.

Sri Swami Satyananda says, “When you go to the market to buy shoes for your two children, buy three pairs: two for your own children and the third for an unknown child. When you buy clothes, buy three sets: two for your children and the

third for a child you do not even know.” If one awakens the feeling of oneness towards a stranger, one’s consciousness and emotions will expand and the selfish tendency will spontaneously reduce.

Every person wishes for love and respect in their life, whether they are poor or prosperous, high or low, young or old. If they can give love and respect to someone who is in need, they will not feel the lack in their life. Regardless of whether the person has a grain of food to eat in the house or not, they will not feel the shadow of scarcity if there is love and respect. When they give a person love and respect, they are giving love and respect to the God residing within that person.

If they believe that God resides within everyone, that He is omnipotent, it becomes their duty to please God, to keep Him happy. When one sees a hungry person, it is God residing within that person who is hungry. It is not only the stomach that feels the hunger; the experience is also felt in the *atma*, the spirit. If a person is unhappy, God within that person is also unhappy. God is a reflection of human feeling and emotion, and every individual is a reflection of God’s emotion.

This is the key to spiritual life and the secret of life. This is the truth of life. If one can see that divine spark within others and help to remove the lack in their lives so they may grow and develop to experience peace, plenty and prosperity in their lives, then this is the highest form of bhakti. This is seva, this is love and this is atmabhava.

How did some of the great bhaktas express seeing God in all?

Swami Sivananda: The devotee feels that the world is a manifestation of the Divine and that all movements and actions are His lilas. He has no repugnance or dislike for faecal matter and dirt, and for an outcaste, scavenger, cobbler, beggar, prostitute and thief. He says, “I see everywhere my sweet Lord. It is Hari who is playing the part

of the prostitute, thief, dacoit and scavenger.” He has an exalted, all-embracing, all-inclusive mental state. This cannot be adequately described in words. It has to be felt. Mira, Gouranga, Hafiz, Tulsidas, Kabirdas and Ramdas enjoyed this state.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa prostrated before an outcaste girl and said, “O Mother Kali! I see You in this girl.”

Ekknath, a Maharashtra bhakta, gave his ring voluntarily to a thief when the latter entered the house. He said to the thief, “O thief! Take this ring also. Your duty is to steal things. You are Vittala. Keep up this play of Yours.”

This is the sublime state of these exalted bhaktas who had a new angle of vision. This state will come one day. Therefore, aspirants should exert, struggle, pray, worship, meditate and plunge themselves in bhajan with zeal, earnestness and fervour.

What is the story of Saint Pavhari Baba?

Swami Sivananda: One day a thief entered the cottage of Saint Pavhari Baba, a contemporary of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. He collected in a bag all the vessels and was about to leave. Pavhari Baba was not in the cottage when the thief entered into it. When the saint entered his kutir, the thief left all the items and ran away. Pavhari Baba carried the bag on his shoulder and followed the thief. He said, “O thief Narayana, I never knew that you were in my cottage. This is your property. Pray, kindly accept them.” He prostrated before the thief and placed the bag at his feet. The thief was thunder-struck. He repented very much for his wrong action. At once, he became a changed man. God’s grace descended on him. He prostrated before the saint and said, “My Lord, I have done a serious crime. Forgive me. Make me your disciple. Give me guru mantra. Initiate me.” He got the guru mantra. He did serious sadhana and meditation and became a saint.

He met Swami Vivekananda in the Himalayas and narrated to him the above incident in detail. Swami Vivekananda was very much attracted by this saint. Pavhari Baba

not only had samadrishti, equal vision, but also had samavarti, equal treatment.

What is the experience of atmabhava?

Swami Niranjanananda: Through the cultivation of atmabhava, one becomes capable of seeing that divine spark in oneself and also in others. When one sees that divine spark in others, then one is connected with everybody, without separation or duality. There is oneness, a feeling that all belong to each other, have to support each other and be a source of strength and inspiration for each other.

How can one develop atmabhava?

Swami Sivananda: One must always entertain this idea: *Vasudevah sarvamiti* – ‘Vasudeva is all’. *Vasudeva* means all-pervading. One will have infinite joy which can only be felt. It cannot be adequately described in words. If one places a big mirror in front of a dog and keeps some bread in front, the dog at once barks by looking at its reflection in the mirror. It foolishly imagines that there is another dog. Even so, a person sees his own reflection only through his mind-mirror in all the people, but foolishly imagines like the dog that they are all different from him and fights on account of hatred and jealousy. However, jealousy will slowly vanish by entertaining this atmabhava.

The bhakta should repeat the formula: “I am the all, I am all-in-all,” feeling himself to be everywhere and thinking that there is nothing save atman, his own self, everywhere.

How does one become sensitive to the suffering of others?

Swami Satyananda: The inner mirror has to be cleaned. It is not necessary to have a pure heart to find God, nor is it necessary to follow *satya*, truth, *ahimsa*, non-violence, or *brahmacharya*, celibacy, but it is necessary to have pure feelings and sensitivity towards Him. Such sensitivity arises out of love. The same love that takes the form of passion and desire takes the form of affection and devotion.

The basic feeling of passion and devotion is the same. With the same steel one can make a dagger to kill someone or a surgical knife to save someone's life. The basic emotion of passion and devotion is the same – it is one, not two. It is the individual who creates the distinction. Sometimes one uses that basic stuff as passion and desire, and sometimes as devotion and bhakti.

How does one learn to love everyone equally?

Swami Satyananda: By developing humility, egoism goes away of itself. The practice of humility and pure love, love without attachment, natural love, enables one to love all equally. There is a practice of bhakti yoga called kirtan which many practise to awaken the inner love, the pure love. Kirtan is not only singing God's name but singing with love and devotion. Mantra also awakens the love. Then one tries to feel the same love for people known to one or complete strangers. By this practice one attains a state where one loves everyone the same.

Why do the social status and external appearance not matter for a bhakta?

Swami Sivananda: Saintliness is not affected by distinctions between the rich and the poor, between one profession and another. The discipline of surrender to the Divine does not demand the special qualifications of caste, birth, clan or sex. The reason for all saints being of equal eminence is mentioned in the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutra 73):

Yatastadeeyaah.

Because they are all His own.

Devotees belong to God. They are the objects of His special love. He loves them for their sincere devotion and pure, virtuous life. Devotees become the embodiment of the Divine, therefore they lose all sense of difference among themselves. Devotees are equal in the sight of God because their devotion is the same in spite of apparent physical and

social differences. To a devotee all creatures in the world are the children of God or God Himself. Therefore, he sees them with equal vision or *samadrishti*.

What is the sadhana of equal vision?

Swami Sivananda: Serve all. Serve the Divine in all. Love all. Respect all. Develop cosmic love. Have atmabhava, atma-drishhti and samadrishti. Hatred disappears. The sadhana of equal vision is extremely difficult, but strenuous and constant effort bring about success eventually.

Aspirants who wish to abolish the dividing line should immediately develop love for a very dear person, after him for an indifferent person and then after him for an enemy. In doing so, in each compartment they should make the heart tender and loving and should immediately afterwards induce *dhyana*, meditation. One should discriminate between a thief and an honest man, but one should love the thief. A worldly-minded person hates a thief, sees him outside and considers that he is entirely separate from the thief; whereas, a jnani loves a thief as his own Self and sees him within himself. When one remembers that a savage or a rogue is a saint of the future and has the divine qualities in a potential form, one begins to love everybody. Hatred slowly vanishes. The evolution and development of the rogue or the savage is only a question of time.

What is the aim of atmabhava in bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Seeing within other beings, whether animate or inanimate, that aspect of divinity which one has experienced within oneself is the highest form of compassion, where the individual self is totally eradicated. One is God and everything is God. The same light that shines within shines everywhere.

How can one compare the sensitivity in people and animals?

Swami Satyananda: People should be as sensitive as my dog, Bhole. When Swami Niranjan is on his way to Rikhia, the

breeze from the north excites Bhole from fifteen miles away. He prances in joy, runs to me and conveys in his own way that Swami Niranjana is coming. This is what one's sensitivity should be like. In fact, animals are much more sensitive than human beings. Cows and horses are very sensitive animals.

Bhole is so sensitive that when I leave him in the evening he feels downcast and forlorn. When I come back to him he keeps quiet and does not greet me. He asks me, "Why do you go away and leave me?" I tell him, "I go out to meet people." He says, "But you said you wanted to live alone, in solitude, and now what is this? Why do you go out to be with others, leaving me behind? Why don't you take me along with you?" I say, "But you bark too much." Then pat comes his reply, "But you yourself bark. Don't all of you bark?" He thinks we all bark.

Animals surpass humans in sensitivity and feeling. Humans confine their feelings within family bonds. There is a strong sense of discrimination and differentiation in humans, a strong feeling that 'this is mine' and 'that is yours'. The sum and substance of spiritual life, the best teaching of Vedanta, is atmabhava.

How do the vedantic scriptures explain atmabhava?

Swami Satyananda: In Vedanta, to be able to see oneself in all living beings is called atmabhava. Atmabhava is explained in the *Kathopanishad* and all Upanishads. It is also described in the *Bhagavad Gita* (6:29):

*Sarvabhutasthamatmanam sarvabhutani chaatmani;
Ikshate yogayuktaatma sarvatra samadarshanah.*

The impartial individual, immersed in yoga, sees all living beings in himself and himself in all living beings.

This is the way to atmabhava. However, it is very difficult to practise. Usually one thinks, 'I have no connection to others – she is not my wife, he is not my son or my brother,

he is not from my caste or religion, nor from my village, and I have nothing to gain from him.'

To feel the pain of another man in distress is possible only for the great souls. Their hearts are moved, *Sant hridaya navanita samana* – "A sage's heart is as soft as freshly churned butter." An ordinary person's heart is moved only by those they know and love, or those they have been friends with for years. If someone has obliged a person in some way, it is natural to care about that person. However, if one feels that way for someone with whom one has no feeling of belonging, that is *paropkara*, working for the welfare of others, and it purifies the soul.

How does atmabhava purify the heart?

Swami Niranjanananda: Emotion cannot be understood logically. Intellect is a function of the head and emotion is a function of the heart. When one tries to combine both, one creates confusion. Therefore, yoga has been clear in stating that the meditative dimensions of yoga such as pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi deal with transforming the manifestations of intellect in the realm of the mind. Once the mind is pacified then purity of heart has to come about. That purity can be achieved by enlarging one's heart, expanding one's feelings, developing atmabhava, seeing oneself in others.

When the aspirants are able to see themselves in other people then the emotions become bhakti, the emotions become purified. That is not an easy thing to do. How can I see myself in others? How can I discriminate as to how much I can do to make the other person happy? This is the role of *viveka*, discrimination, which comes when truth, *satya*, is experienced with the channelling of emotions. In Rikhia, Sri Swami Satyananda is teaching everyone how to live. It is a learning process. It is excellence in the expression of personality, the expression of attitudes, performance, thought; excellence in knowing what is needed. It is that excellence which one has to imbibe and that can only come with atmabhava, when one is able to see oneself in others.

What sadhana can be done to encourage atmabhava?

Swami Niranjanananda: Seeing oneself in others is not easy as one is so caught up in one's own desires and aspirations. Therefore, it is not something that one can decide to start doing from today. It is easier to perfect meditation than to perfect atmabhava. To manage the mind is easier than to manage one's emotions. Just as there is pratyahara, dharana and dhyana for the mind, there is pratyahara, dharana and dhyana for the emotions as well. To stop the chatter of the mind one has to practise antar mouna. To stop the dissipated emotions one has to practise antar darshan. To be able to witness the mind one needs to practise chidakasha dharana. To be able to witness the emotions one needs to practise hridayakasha dharana. Yoga has stated clearly that these are the techniques by which one can manage the mind and purify one's emotions. If one maintains the effort in sadhana, one will come to a point where one will be able to see oneself as part of other people, and that is the fulfilment of yoga.

How does sensitivity relate to sympathy for others?

Swami Satyananda: If atmabhava, the sense of selfhood, is not expanded, sadhana is useless. Atmabhava means feeling for others like one does for oneself. When one's child falls sick, what happens? Yet when someone else's child falls sick in the neighbourhood, one just says, "Give him cortisone," and does not think beyond that. Nothing happens in the heart, or in the head either. One goes to sleep peacefully although the child is still sick. The work has been done, the medicine applied, the doctor called. One can make the phone calls, one may even take the child to the doctor by ambulance, but the feeling that one has when one's child is sick does not come because there is no atmabhava there.

One should not live only for those who are one's own, but live a little for others also. The happiness and sorrows of the world cannot be shared totally; that is only possible for God, but in some little way one can share the sorrows of others and find a place in the heart for people who are unknown.

One has to act out one's compassion and feelings on behalf of these people. Consolation with words only is not enough. Thinking on behalf of others in the same way that one thinks about oneself is the true test of Vedanta. To think, 'I am Brahman, you are Brahman' doesn't work. There is nothing in it.

What helps one experience others as part of oneself?

Swami Satyananda: Knowing the Self is necessary to keep oneself disciplined, without any craving for name and fame, or even for doing service and helping others. There is a difference between the feeling of service and the feeling of Self. The feeling of Self means atmabhava, the sentiment of others being like one's own Self. If one is hurt one feels pain, that is natural, but does one also feel pain if someone else is hurt? Atmabhava means feeling the experience of others as one's own experience. The sorrow and sufferings of others, the death of somebody unknown, the problems of families who are strangers, are all felt as one's own.

This is atmabhava, not charity. Seeing everyone in oneself and oneself in everyone is the highest attainment of Vedanta. *Atmamani pashyanti bhutani*, which means seeing the Self in all and all in the Self as one Brahman. This has been written in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Upanishads and Vedas, and the rishis and munis said the same thing.

What is the difference between atmabhava and selfishness?

Swami Satyananda: How does one experience this feeling of Self and Brahman, that Brahman which is eternal, constant, immortal, perfect and formless? This does not happen by speaking about it alone. If someone identifies with the pain of another, the problem of that person becomes their problem. If one's mother, sister, daughter or wife is suffering in the house during the night, one won't be able to sleep, but when the member of another person's household suffers, one does not feel anything. This is not atmabhava, this is selfishness.

Everyone is selfish, not selfless, and the path to God proceeds from selflessness. Generosity does not proceed from selfishness. There is only one-way traffic on this route. Whatever spiritual path is followed, it must be a path of selflessness, and this has been said in all scriptures.

What is the philosophy of atmabhava?

Swami Satyananda: Those who have enough of everything should develop the philosophy of atmabhava in their lives. That is the philosophy of Vedanta: we are all the same. All of us, living or dead, are part of the universal soul which resides within everyone. It is easy to say that, but in actual practice the tenet is not followed. In practice 'I' is separate from 'you'. The feeling of oneness comes when we can feel that all those who live around us have the same soul or are part of the same soul that is within and that their sorrow and pleasure are our own sorrow and pleasure.

It may not be possible for one human being to share all the difficulties of their neighbours, but certainly one should have the quality to feel that. One person cannot wipe out the pain of everyone in the world, but there should be the feeling that if someone's child is sick, one should feel the pain that the mother feels for the child, or for that matter the pain of friends, wife, daughters and neighbours, in the same way as one would for one's own kith and kin. This is very important. The sayings of the Upanishads will not be true until that is practised.

This does not mean one has to pay for their education, although it would be good to do so, but at least they should have two square meals a day for their children. There are millions of families in this world whose children do not have two square meals a day.

I often pray to God for another birth and an early departure, because at this advanced age I am not as effective in serving people as I would be if I had a new life. When I see young people fully absorbed in their own selfish ends, I crave even more for a new life because I do not aspire for pleasure

and riches, nor do I crave for a kingdom. My only craving is to serve those who are deprived and living in need. So I pray to God to bless me with a new birth, in a poor family where one feels the pangs of hunger; where one undergoes the torture of cold without adequate clothing, and where one lives and dies in sickness without proper treatment. The pangs of the illiterate mother whose son takes birth and lives in poverty is difficult to fathom. So I intend to have a life of hardship and rise from there.

Swami Sivananda used to say that most sannyasins and sadhus were wasting their time in India because they were in pursuit of their own salvation. Therefore, I pray only for the health and prosperity of everyone. Let everyone be kind and caring to one another and may no one ever experience any distress in their life.

What is the outcome of perfecting atmabhava?

Swami Niranjanananda: When there is atmabhava, there is an increase in inner sensitivity. The aspirants are able to understand the cause of suffering. Right now they are only undergoing suffering, yet when there is atmabhava they understand the cause of suffering. Right now they only know that they are suffering and that they want to be free of it, and they pray to God to free them, yet they do not understand the cause of suffering. With the experience of atmabhava, the potential of the mind expands, for the veils of maya are removed one by one. The mind which was tamasic is now becoming suffused with sattvic qualities.

The mind in which negative qualities predominated is slowly becoming free of these and is cultivating positive qualities. The mind which was selfish is now becoming selfless. It is able to see everyone just as it used to see only itself. It experiences oneness with all.

How does one express atmabhava for all beings?

Swami Satyananda: The world family begins with one's own next door neighbours. The world family starts from

one's own village, from the people in the immediate neighbourhood. One should not talk about Vedanta as long as their misery, shocking condition and abject poverty does not touch a chord in the heart, as long as their suffering does not become part of one's own suffering, their difficulty does not become one's difficulty, their pangs of hunger do not become one's pangs. It is wrong to do so! It would be better to say, "I do not believe in God and that is all."

God permeates the whole of creation like electricity, water and air. The best and easiest way to attain Him is to have a genuine feeling of compassion for one's fellows. Until and unless one considers another person like oneself, there is non-conduction within, just as there is good and bad conduction of electricity. Thinking of others as one thinks of oneself means *atmabhava*, including everybody within one's own heart. The Vedas, Upanishads, rishis and munis have said that *atmabhava*, sympathy and feeling oneness with others, identifying with their woes, is the *sarvatma bhava*, all-encompassing affection for the creatures of the whole world.

What is an example of Swami Sivananda expressing *atmabhava*?

Swami Niranjanananda: There was an incident in Swami Sivananda's life. One day a pilgrim on his way to Badrinath came to him. In those days there were no roads or cars, only bullock carts and one's two legs. The pilgrim was sick. He came to Swami Sivananda's dispensary, described his problem and Sivanandaji gave him some medicine. The pilgrim went on his way. Three hours later, Swami Sivananda felt that the medicine was not the appropriate one. A better one could have been given instead. He called Swami Satyananda and said, "Locate that pilgrim and give him this medicine because it is the right one. I have given him the wrong medicine." Imagine what Swami Satyananda had to do to accomplish this task!

This is a story of *atmabhava*. It was not necessary for Swami Sivananda to go through this motion of over-com-

passion. However, he did not ignore the suffering of any individual or his responsibility, his commitment, dharma or kartavya. That was because he was able to see the divine presence in everyone.

How does one see all with equal vision?

Swami Sivananda: Realize right now your identity and intimate relationship with all beings, with ants and dogs, elephants and tigers, Muslims and Hindus, Jews and Christians. There is only a degree of difference in manifestation or expression. All forms belong to God or Saguna Brahman. When you look at a tree or shrub, a Sikh or a Muslim, endeavour to behold behind the veil of form the real hidden consciousness. If you do this for some time, you will feel inexpressible joy. You will develop cosmic love or unity of consciousness.

What was Sri Swami Satyananda's experience of atmabhava?

Swami Niranjanananda: Once one has had the glimpse of atmabhava, the journey into sannyasa begins. Real sannyasa, real dedication, understanding and creativity manifest when one has atmabhava, proximity to your spirit. Sri Swamiji said many times in his satsang that this should be the purpose and goal of every aspirant. He also said, "As long as I was exploring different methods and means to discover myself, I had to struggle, but when I cultivated atmabhava my path became clear." This was his sentiment. The path becomes clear when one cultivates atmabhava.

SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

What is an example of a bhakta's response to pleasure and pain?

Swami Satyananda: Saint Francis and Brother Leo were ordinary mendicants or beggars, not saints as we think of them now. One day, they went to the village of St Mary and

reached there in the middle of the night. It was snowing. They knocked at an inn door, but when the innkeeper opened the door and saw the beggars, he banged the door shut, so they had no place to stay. Again they knocked because it was very cold and they needed shelter, and again the innkeeper abused them and slammed the door. They were shivering and hungry, so Saint Francis knocked at the door for the third time. The innkeeper opened the door, kicked them both out onto the road where it was snowing and then went back inside, slamming and bolting the door. They were ordinary beggars with weak bodies, who had travelled for miles and miles barefoot and in rags, with great difficulty. Brother Leo was very angry, but Francis was quiet.

The innkeeper suddenly started to feel a little compassion for the two beggars he had kicked out into the snow. He went outside and saw them shivering in a corner, brought them inside to the fire and gave them a hot drink which they quietly took. Then the innkeeper asked them if they minded his kicking them. Brother Leo was ready to give a sharp reply, but Saint Francis said, “No. For me life is a game, the expression of a divine plan, and everything that happens is a part of the cosmic plan. If you kick me out, or take me in, serve me hot food and make me comfortable, it makes no difference. Both are subjects of the mind and body.”

How can pain and pleasure be overcome, just as the saints and sages have done? For them these are subjects of the soul, the *atman*, the self, supreme consciousness. One who lives in the body reacts to physical stimulus, one who lives in the mind reacts to mental stimulus, but one who lives in the soul, the *atman*, the self, reacts to the soul. How can he react to the physical and the mental bodies?

How can we ever hope to behave like Saint Francis?

Swami Satyananda: Saints and sages like Saint Francis are rare, but that is the goal which has to be attained in order to transcend pain. One cannot run away from pain because it follows like a shadow. Disappointments, frustra-

tions, nervous breakdowns and emotional upsets all follow because they are like shadows, and one cannot get away from them unless one is able to transcend the mind and the body. For this purpose, intelligent and sincere practice of yoga should be followed, in the form of hatha yoga, raja yoga and bhakti yoga.

Pain and pleasure can definitely be transcended through yoga, but never intellectually. The great saints and sages have left their marks on history so that people may follow and walk in their footsteps. They are lights, they are the guides and it is their path which has to be followed.

How did Saint Francis express his bhakti?

Swami Satyananda: Saint Francis of Assisi was a great bhakta and his words have inspired many. Here is one of his poems:

All my will is burnt up with love,
Is united to love,
Is transformed into love,
Is consumed and consecrated by love.
Neither the fire nor the sword
Shall separate me from love.
Suffering and death never may rise
To the heights to which love doth lure me on.
Outside the mystic union with love
All created things are restless.
By love the soul is raised,
Is exalted, elevated above everything.

This clearly shows the path and the culmination of bhakti. He expressed his bhakti to everything – the birds, the animals, fellow humans – everything was included in his circle of bhakti. He referred to the sun as ‘brother sun’, regarding it as the image of the Supreme. The moon and the wind were his sisters, as was everything else. He was definitely an intoxicated bhakta.

How did Francis become Saint Francis of Assisi?

Swami Sivananda: Saint Francis (1182–1228) is called ‘the little poor man of Assisi’. His father was a very wealthy merchant and Francis was brought up in luxury and gaiety. He spent a considerable portion of his wealth in extravagant pleasures.

One day, Francis was joking and laughing with his friends when a beggar came along crying for alms. Francis, who was soft-hearted, gave whatever he had in his pocket to the beggar. His companions mocked him for his charitable act, but dispassion had dawned in his heart.

Some time after this, Francis was laid up in bed for many months on account of some serious disease. He was about to die, but God saved him, as he had to carry out a definite mission in his life. The nature of Francis was entirely changed. He had a vision of Lord Jesus and made a strong determination to renounce his old way of living to tread a life of purity and to dedicate his life to the service of humanity. His parents were disappointed and became angry with Francis, and finally his father turned him out of the house. His old friends even pelted him with stones and mud.

Francis was humble. He loved God’s creatures – birds and beasts. He loved the depressed and the outcasts. He treated the birds, the beasts and all beings as brothers and sisters. Francis and his followers went from village to village preaching the love of God. The gospel of kindness and love of Francis soon spread all over Europe and earned for him the name of Saint Francis. The influence of Saint Francis and the sweet aroma of the life he lived will last forever.

EKNATH

Who was Eknath?

Swami Sivananda: By 1533, Hinduism as a spiritual culture had been degraded both by the intellectual egoism of the higher castes and the demoralizing forces of repeated invasions. Scholars quoted scriptures mechanically, but the essence of the scriptures was rarely lived. Their knowledge

earned them wealth or power, but it did not touch their hearts. At this time, Eknath (1533–1599) was born in Paithan to a devout couple, Suryanarayanam and Rukmini, both of whom died in his childhood. He was brought up by his grandfather, Chakrapani, and great-grandfather, Bhanudas, both devotees of Panduranga of Pandharpur.

At six years of age, when his thread ceremony was performed, the child who was fired by an intense desire for the truth, heard a voice asking him to go to Daulatabad, “For there your guru awaits you.” He walked for three days to reach his destination. Such was his faith. He was then directed to Janardhana Swami who, moved by the intense desire for liberation in the child, took him as his disciple.

Eknath was of an emotional temperament and bhakti became his path. “In my purified mind,” he was to sing later, “I lit the lamp of dharma and offered the panchapranas to him as homage.” His bhakti burnt almost all trace of ego in him. Twice he had visions of Dattatreya, once as a hunter and once as a Pathan. Both times he rejected the forms due to ignorance. In the course of time he was fully purified. His preconceived notions of good, bad, holy and unholy were washed away. When the Adiguru appeared as a *chandala*, an untouchable, Eknath offered himself as an instrument and with the guidance of his guru, received the blessings of a higher consciousness.

He then practised tapasya on the hill Sulabhanjana and had a vision of Sri Krishna. On the advice of Guru Janardhana, Eknath married Girija Bai and lived an exemplary life as a grihastha. Inspired by his lifestyle, bhakti was awakened in the lives of the common people who had hitherto thought that spiritual life was only for those rare souls who renounced all and retired to the forest.

Eknath’s bhakti united the Datta worshippers and the Varkaris. Being a poet, his bhakti burst into songs which thousands joined in. His devotional songs touched the hearts of the common folk and with tears streaming from their eyes, they would sing and dance, day and night, with cymbals and

drums. Thus the collective consciousness was elevated. He edited the *Jnaneshwari* and wrote the *Bhavartha Ramayana* and *Rukmini Swayamvara*. He left his body in 1599. His grandson was Mukteshwara, who was born dumb but became a great poet by the grace of Eknath.

What kind of person was Eknath?

Swami Sivananda: Eknath was a saint of para bhakti. He saw and felt God in everything, in every moment and in every action. Anger was unknown to Eknath. Some of the mischievous people of the village wherein Eknath was living wanted to excite him one way or the other. The villagers bribed a Mohammedan and asked him to excite Eknath in some manner. The Mohammedan agreed. He went to the bank of the river and waited at the place where Eknath used to take his bath. When Eknath came out after his bath the Mohammedan spat on his face. Eknath did not speak a word, simply laughed, and went again to take another bath. When he came out, the Mohammedan again spat on him. Eknath smiled and went for another bath. This process went on one hundred and eight times. Eknath was not at all affected. He was an embodiment of patience itself. When the Mohammedan found that Eknath was absolutely serene, he thought, “Eknath is not a man. He is a god.”

Eknath was a great devotee. Sri Krishna assumed the form of a poor Brahmin boy, and under the name of Kandia, lived as a water carrier in the house of Eknath for a period of twelve years rendering such service as bringing water for the pooja, making sandal paste for worship, and removing the leaves after dinner. After this period, Kandia disappeared miraculously.

Eknath wrote the *Bhagavat*, which holds the same place of respect in Maharashtra as Tulsidas' *Ramacharitamanas* holds in Northern India. It is popularly known as *Eknath Bhagavatam* and is found in every house in Maharashtra. A staunch bhakta, a great bhagavata, an ideal householder and a great saint, he still shines as a model for all people.

How did Eknath express compassion?

Swami Sivananda: In those days when there was no railway communication, Eknath went on foot on a pilgrimage to Gangotri. He stocked water from the source of Ganga in vessels and carried them in a Kavadi of bamboos on his shoulder. The vessels should not touch the ground. He went to Benaras and performed pooja-abhisheka of one vessel of Gangotri water on Kashi Vishwanath. He proceeded to Rameswaram to perform abhisheka there on Ramalingeshwar.

On the way, a few miles from Rameshwaram, Eknath saw an emaciated, diseased ass dying of thirst. The sun was scorching. Eknath thought that God wanted to test him. He was a saint of para bhakti. He saw and felt God in everything, in every movement, in every action. He could never be deceived. He thought it was the best opportunity to serve Ramalingeshwar in the ass. He never took this being for an ass. He forgot the *nama-roopa*, name and form. He saw the essence, sat-chit-ananda, in the ass. He remembered the words of Sri Krishna to Uddhava: “See me in everything. Make prostration to asses for, I am the *antaryamin*, the Supreme Being within.”

Eknath never grieved a bit that he had lost the chance of serving Ramalingeshwar. He thought, “This is the best opportunity. This is tantamount to the feeding one lakh Brahmins.” He broke the top of the vessel and gave the ass the water to drink. Then and there he had darshan of Ramalingeshwar.

What is the experience of oneness?

Swami Niranjanananda: *Sayujya* is developing inner identity, the inner feeling of oneness, being able to perceive the spark of spirit within oneself and in everything around. That only happens if there is atmabhava, being able to project one’s spirit and feel what the other person is feeling.

The Indian saint Eknath went on a pilgrimage from north to south India on foot. He collected water from the

source of the Ganga in the Himalayas with the purpose of taking it to the Rameshwaram temple at the southern tip of India. It took Eknath many months to complete this journey. As he was nearing the temple to offer the water, he saw a donkey, dying of thirst on the road. He said to God, "I see you dying of thirst in the body of a donkey, therefore, let me give you this water I have brought." He gave the water to the donkey. Anyone else would have taken the water inside the temple and poured it over the Shivalingam, but Eknath had the vision and perception that the divine spark is in each and every thing.

When one does the wrong thing, there is always divine intervention. When one does the right thing, again there is divine intervention, yet this time one is carried in the hands of God. One experiences that inner purity which can only come when one becomes egoless. When the identity of oneness begins to develop, the ego subsides. The ego will always be the cause of duality and egolessness will be the cause of unity.

Atmabhava is experienced at different levels. Once, I was a passenger in a car driving through a forest in Tasmania. We passed a giant willow tree beside a lake. I was watching it and spontaneously I lost body awareness and became the tree. I could feel everything the tree was feeling: the water lapping at the base of the trunk, the roots in the ground, the birds sitting on the branches, the leaves falling off. I wondered what was happening. It was not a pleasant experience, for being used to the consciousness of a human, to suddenly have the consciousness of something else is not at all pleasant. To feel being a tree one hundred percent is uncomfortable. It took me some time to come out of that experience.

Such an experience can be considered samadhi, however, it is at a lower level than the experience of oneness with the cosmic consciousness. That type of atmabhava, or identification, just happens whenever it is not desired, whenever one is not ready. Somehow the switch comes on.

The experience of atmabhava can be cultivated through developing compassion. Without compassion, atmabhava is impossible. To develop compassion, one must develop a deep inner feeling for others, which is much more powerful than an intellectual idea or concept. Atmabhava is not only a mental idea, projecting oneself to understand the suffering, nature or quality of others, but also connecting with others at the heart level.

Atmabhava is the only way to achieve *sayujya*, oneness, union, identification, merger. Atmabhava is the only way to progress in spiritual life. One needs to move from the selfish attitude where the focus is on ‘me and mine’, to the selfless approach, where the other is part of me. This is attitudinal yoga. Oneness, identification, atmabhava, is a multi-layered experience, the simplest form being mother and child, and the highest form becoming one with the cosmic consciousness, which knows no barrier of time, space and object.

RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA AND SARADA DEVI

How did Ramakrishna describe his teaching?

Swami Satyananda: Ramakrishna continuously reflected on the image and attributes of Kali, day and night. His bhakti was such that he could not stop thinking of her. Eventually, he saw her everywhere and in everything. This was his path to illumination.

He was often asked by people: what is the way to the Supreme? His answer was sharp and definite: bhakti yoga. He said time and time again that bhakti yoga is the best sadhana for the Kali Yuga of the present.

To my Divine Mother I prayed only for pure love.
At Her lotus feet I offered a few flowers and I prayed:
Mother! here is virtue and here is vice;
Take them both from me.
Grant me only love, pure love for Thee.
Mother! here is knowledge and here is ignorance;

Take them both from me.
Grant me only love, pure love for Thee.
Mother! here is purity and impurity;
Take them both from me.
Grant me only love, pure love for Thee.

Ramakrishna was a practical man. He said, "So long as passions are directed towards the world and its objects, they are enemies. But when they are directed towards a deity, then they become the best friends to man, for they take him to illumination. The desire for worldly things must be changed into longing for the Supreme; the anger which you feel for the fellow man must be directed towards the Supreme for not manifesting Himself to you . . . and so on with all other emotions. The passions cannot be eradicated, but they can be turned into new directions."

A disciple once asked him, "How can one conquer the weaknesses within us?" He answered, "When the fruit grows out of the flower, the petals drop off themselves. So when divinity in you increases, the weaknesses of human nature will vanish of their own accord." He emphasized that the aspirant should not give up his practices. "If a single dive into the sea does not bring you a pearl, do not conclude that there are no pearls in the sea. There are countless pearls hidden in the sea. So if you fail to merge with the Supreme during devotional practices, do not lose heart. Go on patiently with the practices, and in time you will invoke divine grace." It does not matter what form one cares to worship. He said, "Many are the names of the Supreme and infinite are the forms through which He may be approached. In whatever name and form you choose to worship Him, through that He will be realized by you." He indicated the importance of surrender on the path of bhakti yoga when he said, "As dry leaves are blown hither and thither by the wind, without any choice of their own, so a bhakta also moves in harmony with His will." Then to further illustrate surrender he uttered, "Not I, not I, Thou . . . Thou."

Ramakrishna saw the Supreme in everything. He once said, “I have come to the stage of realization in which I see the Supreme walking in every human form, manifesting Himself alike through the sage and the sinner, the virtuous and the vicious. Therefore, when I meet people, I say to myself, “I see the Supreme in the form of a saint, the Supreme in the form of a sinner, the Supreme in the form of righteousness, the Supreme in the form of unrighteousness.”

What was the nature of Ramakrishna’s relationship with Kali?

Swami Satyananda: In the nineteenth century there was a great saint in India. His name was Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Such people are not born every day. He was illiterate and the guru of Swami Vivekananda. Through bhakti he merged with highest knowledge. His power of intellect became very sharp, and many highly educated people would sit and listen to his words. The educated came to an uneducated person for guidance and wisdom; this almost seems to defy understanding. Higher awareness does not depend on formal education.

He was married when he was thirteen years old, but he never had any relationship with his wife. He always used to address her as mother. He was appointed as a priest in Calcutta, in a Kali temple and he used to worship Kali with absolute devotion. Every time he had darshan or a universal experience of Kali, he used to go into *samadhi* or trance. Many intellectuals heard this about him.

It was a difficult period for Indians, because India was under British rule and the educated people used to go to Oxford and return with the new light of intellectualism. Maybe they believed in God but they did not believe that God can be seen. When they heard that this illiterate man, this illiterate Brahmin, was able to see Kali, they said, “Oh! It is all bogus!”

When they asked him, he just gave one reply, “Cry before Her as a child cries before his mother. Don’t worry about your

food or your worldly needs; just cry before Her like the little baby and you can have the experience of the universal spirit.”

How does the practice of meditation help an aspirant find their beloved?

Swami Satyananda: There was a great swami called Swami Totapuri. He heard that Ramakrishna was worshipping Kali as his mother and he thought that Kali was the only reality. Totapuri was a Vedantin philosopher. He believed, ‘I am everything’. So he came to Ramakrishna and asked him to meditate on ajna chakra and on the self, the ‘I’. Ramakrishna said; “I can’t see the self; I see Kali,” because he loved Kali.

There is no difference between the self and Kali, when one has converted, transformed, changed the limitless consciousness into a form of Kali or Krishna. If one concentrates on the guru, and in concentration, in meditation, the guru becomes clear in one’s mind, who is he? He is one’s own self! One has become the form of guru.

How did Ramakrishna Paramahansa express unity in diversity?

Swami Niranjanananda: Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the guru of Swami Vivekananda, lived a simple life. He was able to communicate with Kali – speak to her like people can speak to each other. He would speak to Kali, tell her his problems, other people’s problems, just like people can communicate. Kali would answer him.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa was one sadhu who lived every tradition. For years he was a pure Catholic follower. For years he became a devout Muslim. For years he became a perfect Jew. For years he became a perfect Shaiva, a Buddhist, an Aghora – he became everything.

What was the fruit of Ramakrishna’s intense devotion?

Swami Satyananda: In the beginning, occidental scientists dismissed Indian spirituality as unreal, but now, on the basis of scientific experimentation and research, they

are accepting it as real. The devotion of Ramakrishna Paramahansa is well known. His sadhana and devotion was so intense that he had the darshan of Kali Ma, Mother Kali, in the stone idol. This is not imagination. This is a truth. If one persists on the path of sadhana, a stage comes when the aspirant marches rapidly into the realm of transcendental experience. Then he feels the divine vibrations even in the most gross and inanimate objects.

What caused Ramakrishna to go into a trance?

Swami Satyananda: Ramakrishna was a yogi of the highest order. He was a great bhakta, so much so that if money was kept under his bed, he would get a burn on his skin. He was that sensitive! Once devotees put a few coins under his bed and when he got up, he had burns on his body. One day, Totapuri and Paramahansa discussed with each other the superiority of bhakti or Vedanta, of saguna or nirguna. When Totapuri was talking about Brahma, the *advaita avastha* or the non-dual state, nothing happened to Ramakrishna, but when he started talking about Kali, he fell into a trance immediately.

What is the sign of a genuine or real trance?

Swami Satyananda: Ramakrishna was appointed as priest in a Kali temple in Calcutta, with his monthly salary of maybe fifteen rupees or twenty rupees. After a few days, complaints were received by the director of the temple proprietor that this priest was crazy, and that he was very much disturbed because the priest, the *poojari*, has to do the worship in a correct manner. The complaint was: 'When he is supposed to offer the flowers to Kali, he offers them to himself, and when he is supposed to wave the *arati*, the flame of fire, he does it to himself. At the end when the *prasad*, the offering of sweets, is made to God, he offers them to himself'.

This definitely went against the principles of the Hindu religion, as a priest or *poojari* is not supposed to behave that way. However, Ramakrishna was no ordinary *poojari*, because

for him, when he worshipped Kali, he became Kali and when he became Kali, the confusion came – to whom to offer the flowers, here or there? The fact is that Kali is ‘my’ reflection.

His actions were reported to the founder of that Kali temple. She was a local princess. When she came, she observed that at the time of doing the rituals Ramakrishna used to enter into trance, and in that trance he lost duality. The duality between God and devotee was lost. What he was supposed to do to God, he did to himself, but because it was genuine, it was accepted. If in trance one does not lose duality, it cannot be trance. In sleep one loses the sense of duality for the time being. Why not when one is before one’s deity or god?

Who was Sarada Devi?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sarada Devi of Bengal was one of the greatest female saints of this era. She was born to a pious Brahmin couple in the village of Jayrambati and was married at the age of six to a madman of God, Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya. By the time she was old enough to join her husband, he had already taken sannyasa and his name was Ramakrishna Paramahansa. At the age of nineteen she travelled from her native village to Calcutta in order to stay with her husband who was a poojari at the Dakshineswar temple. After her arrival, one of the first questions Ramakrishna asked his young wife was, “Have you come here to drag me down to the worldly plane?” To this question she replied, “No, I have come only to serve you so that you may go ahead on your chosen path.” After this, the relationship of preceptor and disciple was superimposed on the marital one, both living together as sannyasins and vowed to lifelong celibacy.

This spiritual couple developed a deep affection for one another, purged of all impurities and mingled with deep reverence. Each perceived in the other a clear manifestation of the Divine Mother. On one auspicious occasion, Ramakrishna made Sarada Devi sit before him and wor-

shipped her as the Divine Mother, observing the rituals prescribed by the tantras for *shodashi pooja*. By the time it was completed, she and Ramakrishna had fallen into a beatific trance. Thus transcending the sensory world, the couple shed the last vestiges of duality and merged their original Self. Ramakrishna concluded the ceremony by prostrating himself before her and uttering the prescribed salutations. After this, Ramakrishna always gave the same respect to Sarada Devi as he gave to the Divine Mother.

For fourteen years, from the age of nineteen to thirty-three, Sarada lived off and on with the master, whom she served assiduously with one-pointed devotion. To look after his health, to hear his voice and to see him from a distance would give her intense joy. Being a *purdah* woman, as were most of the village women of her time, she could not sit freely with her husband when his disciples and devotees were near, thus exposing herself to their gaze. So she kept herself hidden away for most of the day, spending her time in *japa* and meditation from early morning and cooking for the master and his devotees during the day. Engrossed in her labour of love, her heart would always remain pinned to the master. Her mind followed him so closely that she was able to hear from a distance what he said in his own room.

After Ramakrishna's death, when Sarada was removing her bangles to put on widow's garb, the master suddenly appeared before her saying, "Where have I gone? I have just shifted from one room to another." This vision was enough to assure Sarada that she need not behave like a widow. Such repeated contacts on the subtle plane made her feel his constant presence by her side and filled her with the intense delight of spiritual vision. One day she lost herself completely in an ecstatic trance and behaved exactly as the master would have done when in that mood.

As the visions and ecstasies increased, a great change took place in her mental outlook and behaviour, enabling her to use her divine power for the upliftment of others, filling the vacant place left by Ramakrishna. Soon his dis-

ciples and devotees had rallied around her. Thus at the age of thirty-five, Sarada began her spiritual ministrations, quenching the thirst of many aspiring souls. People came to her from every walk of life to remove their sufferings, and she became the refuge of them all. Cast in the mould of absolute egolessness like Ramakrishna, she stood out in unique splendour as an endearing mother, enfolding all who came to her with boundless affection.



4

Contentment – Living the Peace of the Soul

Contentment is the eighth form of bhakti yoga. When one is content, one is fulfilled and does not see the faults or mistakes of others. When contentment becomes the dominant quality in one's life, the nature is pure, complete, and needs nothing further added to it. When one is content, there is an inner stability, no desire for gain, no fear of loss; one is just being oneself.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

POSITIVITY – THE GLASS IS ALWAYS HALF FULL

What is the power of thought?

Swami Sivananda: 'As a man thinks, so he becomes', this is one of the greatest laws of nature. Thought is life. What you think, that you are. Your thoughts create your environment. Your thoughts constitute your world. Every thought, emotion or word produces a strong vibration in every cell of the body and leaves a strong impression there. Thoughts of love, peace, contentment, purity, perfection and divinity will make you, and also others around you, perfect and divine.

As are your thoughts, so must be your life. The world around you is only what you believe it to be. Your circumstances and environment, your states of happiness and

misery, are effects of your own thoughts. The limit of your thought is the limit of your possibilities. Think you are pure, pure you will become.

What are the tools to remain positive?

Swami Sivananda: One should try to acquire the power of closing oneself against detrimental or undesirable influences by making oneself positive by a particular attitude of the mind. By so doing, one may be receptive to higher impulses of the soul within and to higher forces and influences from without. By making a suggestion to oneself, 'I close myself to all things below; I make myself positive and open and receptive to all higher influences, to all things above', by taking this attitude of the mind, consciously, now and then, it soon becomes a habit. The lower and undesirable influences from both the seen and the unseen side of life are closed out while the higher influences are invited. In the degree that they are invited, they will enter.

In the mind there is doubt; there is reality also. One will have to cultivate ideas and ground them till they are firmly fixed and implanted. Clarification of ideas will remove perplexity and confusion in the mind. When a doubt arises, 'whether there is God or not, whether I will succeed in self-realization or not', it must be dispelled by well-directed suggestions and affirmations such as: 'It is true. I will succeed. There is no doubt of this'. In my dictionary, in my vocabulary, there are no such words as: 'I can't', 'it is impossible', 'it is difficult'.

Everything is possible under the sun. Nothing is difficult when one strongly makes up one's mind. Strong determination and firm resolution brings sanguine success in every affair or undertaking.

How does one maintain positive attitudes?

Swami Niranjanananda: One component of bhakti yoga is cultivating wellbeing by observing and modifying one's attitudes and maintaining an optimistic, positive attitude. If

attitudes are negative, there is no inner mental clarity, and the mind goes into a dark space where the world looks grey and glum. Positivity has to be maintained in all situations, knowing that 'this too will pass'. The world is not only suffering. One identifies with suffering for it seems to be greater, and happiness is only a sprinkle of salt on top of the vegetables of suffering. Wanting fifty percent sorrow and fifty percent happiness is a big imbalance. Ninety percent sorrow and ten percent happiness is a good combination. If one starts with ten percent optimism one will begin to love the ten percent of positivity, which in the course of time will multiply and increase until one is fully stable in that positive, optimistic attitude.

Searching for the right association is a philosophy of life. Developing the right attitude is a philosophy of life for it is something practical which can be experienced and felt in one's own self, not a philosophy which says to have love and compassion for all. How can one talk of love, compassion or God, the transcendental and divine, without having purified the mind, behaviour and character?

How can one change negative thoughts and emotions?

Swami Sivananda: One has to watch one's thoughts carefully. If one is assailed by gloomy thoughts and experiences depression, one should sit calmly, close the eyes, find out the cause of the depression and try to remove it. The best method of overcoming gloomy feelings and thoughts is to think of inspiring thoughts and uplifting ideas, for always a positive thought overcomes a negative one.

There are great advantages of cheerfulness. Again and again mentally repeat the formula: '*Om* cheerfulness'. Feel: 'I am very cheerful'. Begin to smile, laugh and sing. This is effective in driving away gloom quite quickly. Chant *Om* loudly several times. Run in the open air. The depression will soon vanish.

You can treat other negative thoughts and feelings in the same way. For anger, think of love, for meanness, think of

generosity, for pride, think of humility, for hypocrisy, think of frankness, and so on. Even if you fail at first, continue, you will be successful in the end.

What is the biggest sin?

Swami Niranjanananda: The biggest sin of all is negativity. The negativity of the human mind and nature can destroy a life completely and disconnect one from the beautiful experience life has to offer. Negativity denies the experience of beauty, the experience of grace and the experience of the peaceful and the tranquil. People's greatest sin is that they are negative. A greater sin is that they cannot handle that negativity. It has to be sacrificed. Limitations, restrictions and obstacles have to be removed so that a new free self can emerge from the ashes of the old.

What is a true bhakta's attitude to the ups and downs of life?

Swami Satyananda: One is born through the grace of God, not through the grace of one's father. One lives by the grace of God. It is by the grace of God that one has started thinking about spiritual life, about how to improve the quality of life in general. It is through the grace of God that things happen in life, both good and bad.

When a lot of money comes, people say, "God is very kind." When a son is born, people say, "God is kind." When a wish is fulfilled, "God is very kind." However, if somebody dies, they say, "Oh, God is punishing me." If money is lost, they say, "Oh God, why?" At that time they should say, "God, Thy will be done. I am dying and everybody is dying. Thy will be done. You may do what you like, give me luxuries, pleasures, prosperity, money, children. I will have it as Thy grace, as Thy *prasad*, Your gift." Or if there is tragedy everywhere, the business fails, the shop fails, friends and family are sick, one should say, "You have given me sickness, it is Thy *prasad*." Whatever happens, it is only God's *prasad*.

What is the importance of being positive?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga has always maintained that one should maintain positivity and protect it from negative influences. Just as one protects one's garden from rodents and insects, one has to protect the good one is trying to cultivate in life from the destructive negative influences which surround one. One has to be observant about the negative things in life. One rotten apple can spoil the whole basket of apples, yet one good apple cannot rectify even one rotten apple. Therefore, one always has to be observant about negative, detrimental influences and try to maintain optimism and positivity, and learn all the time. One should not worry about mistakes, everybody makes them. People who do not make mistakes have never tried anything new. People who make mistakes always try new things.

How can pratipaksha bhavana be applied?

Swami Niranjanananda: *Pratipaksha bhavana*, developing the opposite quality, is ensuring that one is not influenced and affected by that strong feeling, sentiment or emotion. If there is aggression, in the mind one develops friendship. One does not have to interact with the person one considers an enemy, however in one's mind, sentiments and understanding, that person can cease to be an enemy and just be an ordinary person. The result of pratipaksha bhavana is becoming free from the influences of a negative trait by developing a positive trait.

How can pratipaksha bhavana be applied? By trying. If one fails, it is an achievement for the simple reason that one tried! If one succeeds, it is the crowning glory! Applying pratipaksha bhavana has to be done with the right understanding: with dispassion, detachment and discrimination, viveka and vairagya. They develop the sattwic nature, which expresses itself not in the form of self-rebuke and guilt, but in the form of encouragement.

How can pratipaksha bhavana be used to remain positive?

Swami Sivananda: By substituting opposite or counter thoughts for negative thoughts and feelings, one can lead a happy, harmonious life. Thoughts of worry and fear destroy efficiency, vitality and vigour. The opposite thoughts of cheerfulness, joy and courage heal and soothe, improve efficiency and multiply the mental powers.

A thought of love will at once neutralize a thought of hatred. If there is jealousy, the aspirant should think of charitableness and magnanimity. If there are gloomy thoughts, he should think of cheerfulness, an inspiring scene or recall an inspiring passage you have read. If there is harshness of heart, he should think of mercy. Dishonesty must be replaced with truthfulness, hypocrisy with frankness, meanness with generosity, and pride with humility. A positive thought drives off a negative one. Courage drives off fear. Love destroys hatred. Generosity drives away miserliness and greed. Magnanimity destroys petty-mindedness and jealousy. Unity annihilates separateness.

What is the hardest sadhana in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: One important effort has to be made, which is maintaining a positive and balanced attitude. This is possibly the most difficult practice due to the various types of stress one undergoes. Stress disconnects from one's inner harmony, strength, optimism, clarity, creativity and constructive participation in life. To maintain a positive perspective is the hardest thing to acquire in life. One should analyze oneself for a few moments and see if one is optimistic or pessimistic by nature. Is there happiness or depression in the face of challenges? What kind of nature is predominant right now?

To remain positive is the hardest sadhana of life. The aspirant tries to understand the components of awareness and positivity that need to be cultivated. Just as salt gives taste to food, awareness gives taste to the mental expressions and experiences. One can be positive only if there is constant awareness.

What are some of the practices that can help one remain positive?

Swami Niranjanananda: Positive thinking in all situations and connecting and identifying with one's inner strengths, *sadvichara*, is a sadhana of bhakti yoga. When one experiences any difficulty or suffering, one prays to God to help one overcome shortcomings and distress. One feels there is pain and suffering within and one cannot connect with the source of strength, so one prays to an outer figure, God, for help.

Another approach is to recognize one's own strength and remain positive. It is difficult to maintain a balanced attitude in all situations. Arrogance has to be under control. If one is arrogant, one will see the negative in whatever is being said and done, and react. The moment one is able to manage the ego and learn humility, one will become more positive and, with humility, discover the strength within. In a tempest, a banyan tree can be uprooted by the force of the wind, yet a humble blade of grass simply bends over and stands upright when the wind has gone. If one remains inflexible, one will be uprooted. Thinking to be so strong that nothing can shake one is actually one's weakness; however, if one begins to bend, that humility and acceptance will make one positive. It will give complete control over one's strengths for it will allow one to become humble and face situations with a positive attitude of mind.

The aspirant should live in the present, maintain a positive attitude all the time and associate with people who are positive all the time. If one associates with people who are negative about others, one's thoughts will not remain positive either. Sri Rama stated that there should be no falsity or crookedness in life. This is the process of coming to this point where one can develop a guileless disposition, a mind free from perversity, and absolute contentment. When one lives in the present, one will be contented. If one lives in the past or future, there will be discontent.

How can one achieve balance between negativity and positivity in life?

Swami Satyananda: Negativity is asura and positivity is deva. These are the two tendencies in every personality. There is a constant, unending conflict between these two forces. If this conflict ceases there will be no progress or evolution. Many times people ask, “Why did God create evil?” That is a simple question from simple, religious people. “Why did He create evil? He should have created only good, because He could do it. Why if He is almighty does He not destroy evil?” Evil has a place in the scheme of evolution and creation. Negativity in one’s personality has a purpose in the scheme of physical, mental, moral, social and spiritual evolution. If one is always positive, which of course is impossible, from the beginning of childhood one will go no further than being an idiot.

Negativity is charged with hyperactivity. Negativity is rajoguna and positivity without negativity is tamoguna. When positive nature and negative nature clash with each other and finally negativity is set aside and positivity wins, that is sattoguna. In Samkhya philosophy, tamoguna and sattoguna look alike and are pictured as almost the same.

Positive and negative samskaras in one’s personality should be given a proper chance to balance each other. From tamoguna one moves to rajoguna and from rajo to sattoguna. There is no direct transition from tamoguna to sattoguna. Tamoguna has to be balanced and then rajoguna will manifest. Rajoguna has to be conquered by sattoguna. Realizing that one has many negative qualities, instincts and traits one should not feel sorry about them. They have their place and an important role to play. They are an asset in the scheme of one’s spiritual evolution. However, one must maintain the conflict and keep the struggle constantly alive. One should never think: God should destroy evil, or the guru or a greater spiritual, political or any other power should descend and destroy evil. Evil cannot be destroyed; it is a landmark, a milestone on the path of evolution. It will always be there.

The so-called diabolical and evil tendencies go hand in hand with one's evolution for a very long time, up to the stage of jivamukti when one is totally liberated.

The *Bhagavad Gita* was narrated to a person who was totally blind, Dhritarashtra. Secondly, it was taught to a person who was also blind, Arjuna. He did not have knowledge. All eighteen chapters are entitled 'yoga'. The first chapter is called 'Arjuna Vishadyoga'. *Vishad* means despondency, depression, dejection. Could depression be yoga? Yoga means a method of evolution of the self. Is dejection and depression a way to spiritual evolution? The *Bhagavad Gita* says yes.

When one is terribly angry, one loses one's temper and says so many things. However, later what does one do? One is trying to balance. That balance is called *samyam*, control. Anger and passion do form a part of spiritual life. When one is accepting negativity one is walking on the razors edge. One has to be careful. One may fall this side or that, but after all, one has to walk.

How does one maintain a positive frame of mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: People talk of having a positive frame of mind. Positivity is commonsense; as simple as that. People are not capable of maintaining their positivity. Positivity is like a bubble that comes up and bursts; then again one goes back to the same negative condition, the tamasic condition of mind, thought, behaviour and attitude. When positivity is only a bubble which bursts from time to time, every aspirant has to find out how to develop the strength of positivity. Positivity is a strength; it is not a whim of the mind. Once that strength is awakened, there can be no negativity in life.

Swami Sivananda has given many hints: 'Catch yourself whenever you see yourself in a distorted or dissipated state of mind and pull yourself back, centre yourself and become positive again'. It is a sadhana. Just like one practises surya namaskara, yogasanas, meditation, or yoga nidra, in the same manner, one has to practise pratipaksha bhavana,

day in and day out, continuously as sadhana. Only then can some positivity be attained. Otherwise, positivity and commonsense are the most uncommon things in this world.

How does cheerfulness express a positive approach to life?

Swami Sivananda: Cheerfulness is the quality of being joyful, lively and of good spirits. Cheerfulness lightens the burden of life and gives wonderful strength and power of endurance. Cheerfulness strengthens the heart. A cheerful person is like a sunny day. Cheerfulness is contagious. It transforms darkness into light, depression into brightness and sickness into health.

Cheerfulness is a habit of mind. A cheerful person is full of good spirits and radiates joy everywhere. Cheerfulness is a potent mental tonic. Wear a cheerful smile with a cheerful face. What sunshine is to flowers, cheerful happy smiles are to humanity. A cheerful person will do more in the same time, will do it better and will persevere at it longer than a cheerless person.

A cheerful word cheers others. Cheerfulness is a solace in solitude and distress. It lightens sickness, poverty and affliction. Cheerfulness is a friend to grace. It puts the heart in tune to praise God.

What is the meaning of suffering on the spiritual path?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Sivananda said that ‘nature throws a man into the crucible of pain in order to turn him into a sublime superman’. The idea of suffering is associated with one’s ego expectations. When one does not have something, one desires it; when one has something, one desires something better. Pleasure and pain are aspects of the mind.

There is the classic example of half a glass of water. Is that glass half full or half empty? If one says it is half empty, one is identifying with an absence of something, which will create a craving and associated feelings. If one says it is half full, one is aware of the fullness, not of the absence, and if

one looks at it from the perspective of being full, there won't be craving but an appreciation and joy.

Many people live a pleasant, happy and comfortable life and yet they are unsatisfied. Many people have nothing, yet they are perfectly happy. Who decides what is suffering and what is pleasure? It is one's own ego. Therefore, if one identifies with the positive aspects of oneself, there is no suffering. If one identifies with one's negative aspects, life is only suffering. What people say about suffering being necessary in spiritual life does not mean that one suffers to grow spiritually. One transcends that negative restricted self to experience the wholeness.

SANTOSHA – CALM AND QUIET SATISFACTION

How does contentment express inner balance?

Swami Niranjanananda: The desire for gain comes when there is arrogance. Depression comes with loss when one is not self-willed and lacks self-confidence. When one is one's natural self, then there is contentment. Externally, one is centred and balanced in both victory and defeat. At the psychological level, the mind is properly harmonized and there is no ill will towards anyone or anything. One does not see shortcoming or negativity. Everyone is expressing according to their level of education. In a school the children behave and act according to the class they are in. It is the same in the world. Each one is in a different class and the maturity is according to the class they are in. Finding a balance in the expressions of the mind, generating a feeling of inner contentment and experiencing completeness is the eighth form of bhakti yoga.

Why is contentment essential in yoga and life?

Swami Niranjanananda: The purpose of yoga and the purpose of human life are the same: to excel in whatever field one is in, whether it be as a student, worker, businessman or sannyasin, and to explore the creative aspect of

that field. The purpose is to find contentment in life, and through contentment, total perfection.

Why must one remain content in spiritual life?

Swami Satyananda: Every person has ups and downs in life. Whether the enjoyment or wealth is for accumulation or for use, for knowledge or for liberation, nothing happens through impatience and haste. Whatever has to happen will happen. This has been my experience in life. Therefore, if one desires God, sadhana, liberation or anything else, no matter how much one strives for these, one should just give up worry, anxiety and agitation. In spiritual life nothing happens without the wish of God, even though one may try to find thousands of solutions. It is said that no matter how hard a person strives, without the grace of God, one cannot obtain the grace of God.

I have learnt only one secret of the spiritual path: give up feeling disturbed and be content with whatever you have received from God. Get up in the morning, remember God for some time, do satsang – these are essential in human life. However, whatever you desire from the spiritual path you will not attain through human effort. You will not attain that result through any amount of hard work that you put in. You will get it only if He wishes to give it to you. If He feels like it, you will receive it. If He does not wish it, you will not receive it. No one has any right or control over this process. No one even knows what God's grace is. If He wishes, He will give you an experience, a darshan or vision, or a spiritual life. Otherwise, you can go on flailing your arms and legs; nothing is going to happen.

How does one cultivate contentment?

Swami Sivananda: The mind is ease-loving, easy-going and happy-go-lucky. Aspirants must check this nature. The desire for ease and comfort is ingrained in the mind. Aspirants should be cautious, careful and not try to fulfil their desires. They must not take back those things which they have once

renounced. Whenever they give up an object, the desire for that particular object becomes keen and strong for a few days. It agitates the mind until it gets thinned out and eventually dies.

If one increases one's wants even by one article, the articles will begin to swell in number. Luxuries will come one by one. If one allows the mind to take one luxury today, it wants two tomorrow. Luxuries will increase daily. It will become like an overfondled child. Spare the rod and spoil the child; this also applies to the mind. It is worse than the child.

Those who, without longing for objects, avoid them, can be termed the subjugators of their minds. Those who are not content with anything that comes in their way are of weak minds only. *Santosha*, contentment in the mind, is a great virtue. *Santoshat paramam labhamoby* – 'By contentment you will have great gain'.

It is one of the four sentinels of the vast domain of moksha. If one has this virtue, it will lead to the attainment of *satsang*, association with the wise, *vichara*, enquiry of Self, *shanti*, peace and *samata*, equipoise.

How can one develop santosha?

Swami Niranjanananda: Contentment is an expression of a harmonious and balanced mind. One who does not desire or crave anything, one who is satisfied yet active and dynamic, is in a state of santosha. Often contentment is seen as a negation of effort and people say, "If I am content, it means that I don't have to make any effort. I don't have any desire, I don't have to want anything, I don't have to like anything; I just have to be satisfied with what I have." That is wrong, as it goes against the principle of contentment. Contentment does not deny effort. Contentment emphasizes *purushartha*, the effort that one makes to become better. It is not just an action or performance of life, it is a continuous effort to become better each day.

Nobody makes that effort, and yet everyone wants to have the attainment. Contentment does not deny *purushartha*.

It is an attitude, an awareness that “Yes, I am happy.” Just as one is aware of one’s suffering on a day-to-day basis, on a moment-to-moment basis, one has to be aware of one’s happiness on a day-to-day and moment-to-moment basis. If one has a fight with somebody, the whole day one will be aware of that person. The whole day the thoughts about that person will go around and around in the head, about the awful things said and done. Just as one is aware of the pain and suffering constantly and continuously, can one make the effort to become aware of one’s happiness constantly and continuously? If one can do that, there is santosha and one is contented. Contentment is an awareness, an attitude.

When the aspirant identifies, maintains and sustains for extended periods of time, for as many days as possible, the connection with internal happiness, and minimizes the experiences and projections of pain and suffering, that is contentment.

How does one’s attitude towards people and situations affect contentment?

Swami Niranjanananda: Santosha means finding contentment within and not finding fault with others. Both go hand in hand. Complete santosha is being contented and at peace. Many people are contented but not at peace. They are happy, yet still they try to find faults in other people, situations or circumstances, believing that if they would change, they would become even more contented and happy. That is the ego principle again playing up: ‘I want more, this is not enough.’ If aspirants observe themselves, they will find they are discontented whenever they criticize others, situations or the environment. Santosha means accepting the realities of the situation in which they find themselves, and leaving the critical mind behind, freeing the mind from searching for falsity. Therefore, one should just be in tune with oneself. Once one begins to vibrate in a positive manner, the energy will influence the surroundings and others will be uplifted in their interactions.

How does a bhakta develop the quality of contentment?

Swami Satyananda: A real devotee never murmurs, complains or grumbles over the past or present. He is able to maintain a perfect sense of balance no matter what he faces because he has seen the divine essence that supports and upholds him everywhere.

Whenever a devotee falls into difficulty, he thinks it is God's grace and, therefore, he is always calm, quiet and patient, despite many stressful conditions. He does not attach much importance to the body because he knows that he is not the material body. Therefore, he is freed from the conception of false ego and is equipoised in both happiness and distress. He is tolerant and satisfied with whatever comes by the grace of God. His determination has allowed him to control his senses, to fix his awareness on his spiritual goal, and never to be swayed from devotional service. He has achieved this state of being through steadfastness in sadhana.

The contentment of a *para bhakta*, a supreme devotee, does not necessarily dawn after all his cravings have been fulfilled; rather, it is an outcome of his realization that worldly objects and events can never gratify the senses. He lives by the will of God and is thus forever content. Peace is a quality of the soul because true or everlasting peace emanates from the soul. One who is in tune with the soul has inner peace. Only one who lives by pure faith can live so freely, contented with whatever comes his way.

What is the outcome of santosha?

Swami Sivananda: The aspirant should take everything as it comes, instead of complaining. By this is meant that one seizes every opportunity. One develops easily, gains a great deal of mental strength and evenness of mind. Irritability vanishes. Power of endurance and patience develops. If one has to live amidst noise, one should not complain of it, but profit by it. One may make use of outer disturbances for the practice of concentration. One must develop the power to remain undisturbed by whatsoever may happen. This

power comes with practice. To learn to work under different conditions means progress, and a great deal of mental control.

The practice of contentment can never make one idle. It is a sattvic virtue that propels the aspirant towards God. It gives strength of mind and peace. It checks unnecessary and selfish exertions. It opens the inner eye and moves the mind towards divine contemplation. It turns one's energy into the inner, sattvic channels. It transmutes the gross energy, namely, greed, which is forcing one towards selfish exertions, into spiritual energy, *ojas*.

That person who is contented is always peaceful. He is more energetic. He is introspective and of steady mind. He recognizes the inner life, the atman within. He turns out more work calmly and with a one-pointed mind. It is on the strength of contentment that the sadhus, sannyasins, fakirs and bhikshus move about in the world in a carefree manner by living on alms. It is contentment that emboldens an aspirant to march fearlessly.

How does Sage Patanjali refer to santosha as a niyama of raja yoga?

Swami Satyananda: In the *Yoga Sutras* it is said (2:42):

Santoshaadanuttamasukhalaabhah.

Unexcelled happiness comes from the practice of contentment.

Contentment is one of the fixed rules for a spiritual aspirant who is very serious about the higher aspect of yoga and realization. It is impossible for one who is dissatisfied with oneself or with anything else in life to realize the higher consciousness. Dissatisfaction is one of the great veils of *avidya*, ignorance, and therefore it is to be removed, because it causes many undesirable complexes and brings about a state of psychic illness, and if the mind is ill, no sadhana is possible. The happiness that comes from santosha is unparalleled.

To practise santosha, how does one avoid seeing faults in others?

Swami Niranjanananda: Santosha, contentment, is not seeing faults in other beings. There is a saying by Saint Kabirdas, “I have searched the whole world to find a crooked person, but now I realize there is no one more crooked than me.” One who does not struggle, or fight, who does not see any kind of fault in other people, but who lives and flows with life, is content. After all, who is at fault here? One is expressing oneself according to one’s level of evolution. Grass is small, trees are tall. Is it the fault of the grass that it is smaller than the tree? Is it the fault of the tree that it is taller than the grass? No. There is a natural law governing each and every being, each and every blade of grass, and everyone expresses themselves according to that natural law.

If there is acceptance of the natural law there will be no criticism. Of course, one has to strive to uphold the dharma because that is also a level of bhakti. Sri Krishna could have sat quietly and said, “Everyone is following their law, let the Pandavas do their thing, let the Kauravas do their thing.” He followed his dharma with happiness and contentment. He never criticized anyone.

How can one cultivate balance and contentment in life?

Swami Satyananda: Aspirants should keep the mind pure and life disciplined and restrained. In family life they give full scope to peace, tranquillity and cooperation. They are benevolent and of service to others. They should be forceful in their karmas, sweet and soft in their speech. They should be balanced in food habits, simple in dressing up and above all they should be highly knowledgeable. These aspects should be thoroughly taken care of. They are fundamental elements and secrets of success in day-to-day life. Aspirants should be blissful, full of joy and exalted in spirit, learn to live in happiness and contentment and allow others to live that way.

This is the perception and realization of ‘satyam’. Aspirants should neither do back-biting nor listen to it;

not think evil nor do harm to anyone. They should avoid harshness and help the sick, poor, helpless, aggrieved and widows. They must stop extravagance, and instead write the personal Ramayana of their own life, not Tulsi *Ramayana*.

People should do pooja of human qualities instead of worshipping temples; learn to respect and worship restraint, instead of involvement in *bhoga*, enjoyment. They should display calmness and mildness instead of harshness. The world is brimming with crores of sermons, but what I have mentioned is enough for this life. Oceans have an immense amount of water but just a little bit is good enough to live by.

Why is contentment a sadhana of bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Contentment is the most positive quality of mind. Discontentment leads to strife, frustration, depression and anger, and is the natural result of the association of the senses with the sensorial world. As long as the senses are connected to the world, there is discontentment. No matter what one gains in life there is a feeling of unhappiness and discontentment. If not with oneself, it is with other people. If not with other people, it is with society. If not with society, it is with the world. There is a feeling of discontentment and unhappiness all the time due to strife, pain and suffering.

The opposite quality of discontentment is contentment. The moment one feels contented, one begins to experience peace and happiness. In the absence of contentment, there is no peace and there is no happiness. Therefore, if one wants to discover peace within, one should develop the quality of santosha.

Santosha is a mental attitude: ‘Make me an instrument of Thy love’. It is the state of mind where one submits oneself to the higher grace and lives according to the cosmic will, not one’s own will. If one follows one’s will and desires, then at every step discontentment will raise its head. If one begins to believe and feel that one is only an instrument being played by the divine, contentment will gradually set in.

Someone once asked Sri Krishna, “Why do you always hold a flute?” He replied, “The flute is dear to me.” “Why?” asked the questioner. Sri Krishna said, “The flute is empty inside.” Nothing obstructs the bamboo, it is hollow inside a flute, therefore, any music can be created and played with it. Be like a flute, empty inside, if you want to be dear to God. Let Him play the melody that He wants to play with you.

The melody which God plays in one’s life is already defined and written. It is one’s destiny. Destiny is the melody played by God. If one accepts it, one becomes happy and content and there is no problem at all. However, if one wishes to create and play one’s own melody, there will be a problem, for nobody is a master musician and nobody knows how to use his own instrument.

How many people know how to use the instrument they have received in the right manner? Every individual has received this body; it is an instrument. Instead of using the faculties of the body properly, they misuse and abuse it. Every individual has received this mind, a great instrument which can connect one with the material and the transcendental both, but it has never been used properly. The mind, the intellect, the memory and the ego have always been misused and abused. No one has the skill, knowledge or understanding to improve the quality of karma, mind and life. Therefore, God is the only musician who can play music through the individual, and that music is prewritten in the form of destiny. Those who struggle against destined events find conflict, pain and anxiety at every step of their life. Those who practise santosha are able to accept any condition or situation they find themselves in.

Santosha can come alive only if there is an internal connection with the transcendental Self. In India, if a beggar on the street does not have anything to eat for three days, in the evening he will bring the palms of his hands together and say to God, “This is what you planned for me today; I did not have any food. I hope your planning for tomorrow is different.” This is the attitude that the beggars have: “If I

did not receive anything today it was the will of God. He is deciding what I should receive and what I should not.” In other countries, if a vagabond has not had anything to eat for a few days, he will come with a gun and shoot the next person to take his wallet. It is a different understanding of life.

A person who is even remotely connected with any concept, idea or thought of God, as manifest or unmanifest, with the idea of a cosmic higher Self, will always have greater access to contentment than a non-believer. That connection with the higher Self gives the inner strength to accept and survive any situation of life. It gives the strength and conviction that one is being looked after and can survive. Therefore, santosha is the outcome of having a connection, an understanding, a relationship with one's inner higher Self. The biggest wealth of an individual is contentment. Once one has acquired the wealth of contentment one does not need anything else. Until then one keeps running after mirages. The mirages are created by objects of enjoyment. Therefore, if one can cultivate balance in enjoyment one will experience contentment and become free of the attraction for mirages. Santosha represents the ability to flow in life and not struggle.

Why is contentment a boon?

Swami Sivananda: There is the saying: A contented mind is a continual feast. Contentment is one of the greatest virtues. For one who is content, all the wealth of the world will have no attraction. A contented mind is ever peaceful and joyous. To such a mind, the enjoyment of sensual pleasures is like poison. The mind of a truly contented person is always turned towards God and higher spiritual pursuits.

What does one need to change in one's attitude that would lead to bhakti?

Swami Niranjanananda: It is every individual's natural drive to search for happiness. One wants happiness in one's personal, domestic and social life. Happiness or bliss is

believed to be a human being's intrinsic nature. When one experiences happiness, one also feels joy, a sense of contentment and fullness, *poornata*, in life. Everyone attempts to find happiness in order to experience this sense of fullness.

What is the centre of *ananda*, bliss? What is the path to reach happiness? The scriptures say that only in the complete, the full, the whole, lies happiness and joy. There is no joy in the incomplete, the less than full, or the fragmented. There is joy and bliss only in that which is full; that which is not whole causes sorrow. Bliss is eternal; sorrow is short and momentary. Worldly people say joy is momentary, and sorrow is eternal; however, the scriptures say that sorrow is momentary, while bliss is eternal.

The reason for sorrow is the limited, narrow mind, due to which one considers unhappiness and sorrow to be a companion for life, and happiness to be a fleeting visitor. If people connect to joy and bliss, sorrow is not felt, and if they connect themselves to sorrow then bliss is not felt.

People look at the lack in their lives. However, if the feeling of satisfaction and contentment arises for having received the glass of water, even if it is half-full, then the attention never goes towards the emptiness. Instead, one will see the achievement, the gain. There is both joy and sorrow in the world, and the devotee believes sorrow to be momentary and joy to be eternal.

It is the hallmark of a *sadhaka*, spiritual aspirant, to scorn the illusion of worldly riches and not run after the senses and sense objects. Instead, lasting bliss in the light of God's name is desired and sought. Living in the light of God's name is the state of bhakti. Thus, the simple definition of bhakti is: believing the world to be fleeting, and striving to live in the light of God.

5

Let Thy Will Be Done

The ninth stage of bhakti yoga is ‘Let Thy will be done’, the final letting go of individuality, where one becomes an instrument that God plays upon. One has to become empty like the bamboo of the flute which is totally hollow inside. When one becomes free from self-created barriers, one becomes the darling of God – and then one lives according to the divine will and with the feeling ‘Make me an instrument of Thy love.’

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

UNDERSTANDING ATMANIVEDAN AND SAMARPAN

What is the final stage of bhakti yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The ninth stage of bhakti yoga is creative involvement in the world with purity of spirit. The experience of merger is not the end of bhakti yoga. Creative participation in the world, with positive and constructive interactions and implicit faith, is the expression and fulfilment of what has been experienced in bhakti yoga. The outcome of bhakti yoga is a personality which sees no difference between people. The final outcome of bhakti yoga is an illuminated personality.

What is surrender?

Swami Sivananda: Samarpan is the very essence of devotional love. The ultimate form of love is surrender. Divine love has no element of desire in it. All worldly desires disappear the moment bhakti dawns.

How can surrender be defined?

Swami Satyananda: One side of surrender is surrendering of the ego. The other side is surrender to the divine will, to natural laws or to the wild events of life; this is the meaning of surrender. I have been thinking about this for a long time because, of course, I had a guru and he used to talk about surrender. In all his books he has written about surrender and faith, and I could not question it because after all he was much wiser than myself.

How does one surrender?

Swami Sivananda: Kindle love divine in thy heart, for this is the immediate way to the kingdom of God. Pray to God, sing His glory, recite His name and become a channel of His grace. Seek His will, do His will and surrender to His will. You will become one with the cosmic will. He will become your charioteer on the field of life and he will drive your chariot well. You will reach the destination, the abode of immortal bliss.

What did Swami Sivananda's philosophy of surrender involve?

Swami Satyananda: In this complex world, if a person does not have a personality, if he does not have an ego, he will be in trouble for he will be exploited. Swami Sivananda had one answer to this. He was completely of one opinion: whoever the person is, even if he is wretched, even if he is a murderer, even if he has come to plunder, exploit or harm, one must surrender. That was his philosophy, and he did it – he practised it throughout his life!

To people who criticized him, who insulted him or spoke badly about him (of course there were no bad points in him

but still there were people who criticized him), he used to give great respect. Even in the ashram there were sannyasins who used to criticize Swami Sivananda. Four or five of them would sit down and say, “Swami Sivananda’s English is hopeless. He sings songs like that. He makes faces like this.” Swami Sivananda used to send them coffee and tea and cashew nuts!

How can one understand surrender?

Swami Niranjanananda: Surrender is not a state that can be talked about through the rational mind, as the rational mind always sees difference: you and I, the duality. The dual concept is always seen by the rational mind. Until now, the rational mind has not seen the singular mind, the unified mind, and for that one has to be slightly irrational. Letting go of the attraction to being rational is being irrational, and then it is accepting, knowing, realizing and moving forward in happiness, contentment, bliss and peace. That becomes the nature.

What is involved in real surrender and what are the implications of surrender in the life of a spiritual aspirant?

Swami Satyananda: Surrender is the experience of conceding one’s crude ego. This ego is the basis of individuality. If one goes to religious places, a temple or church, one prays and also speaks a few lines of surrender, “I am Thine, all is Thine, Thy will be done.” This is verbal surrender. Real surrender takes place when one can withdraw one’s ego, which is standing between oneself and divinity, between oneself and the guru, or between oneself and one’s Self. In order to learn this surrender, one must first have a guru. First practise the primary lessons in surrender to the guru, and then one can practise surrender to one’s divinity.

Everybody wants a good life, happiness and good health. Nobody wants a bad life, to be unhappy or unwell. Why should people only want to live according to their own choice? Let Him choose. There is a higher reality, a greater law, the universal law, which is responsible for every

experience in one's life – one's body, existence, birth and creation. Everything is an expression of that universal law, which is a mighty law, an intelligent law, an omniscient law that controls each and every aspect of life. That realization must dawn. It has been seen that from time to time nations, races and tribes have experienced this. There are people who have surrendered themselves, who are devoted to spiritual life, who are related to a guru, and are trying to establish union with their inner self. It is for those people that the act of surrender at every level is important.

What does surrender mean to the bhakta?

Swami Sivananda: This self-surrender is absolute and exclusive love for God. There is nothing but God-consciousness in the devotee. Even against his own wishes the devotee will become one with God and lose his individuality. This is the law of being. The highest truth is absoluteness and the soul rises above through different states of consciousness until it attains absolute perfection, when it becomes identical with God. This is the culmination of all aspiration and love.

There are innumerable verses in the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Srimad Bhagavatam* establishing the truth that self-surrender is the only way to attain the Supreme. Sri Krishna teaches Arjuna that total and exclusive self-surrender alone can give him peace and relieve him from all sins. One who studies the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Srimad Bhagavatam* will come to know what great importance is given to total self-surrender. Self-surrender is the annihilation of individual consciousness and the attainment of absolute consciousness. This is equal to *nirvikalpa samadhi* or direct realization. The devotee flies to the state of supreme devotion and merges in God. The wave subsides in the ocean, the spark becomes one with the fire, the ray is absorbed into the sun, the mind merges in the atman and the individual loses himself in the Absolute and becomes one with God. Worldly consciousness vanishes into universal consciousness. Man becomes God, and the mortal becomes immortal.

Whatever belongs to God becomes the belonging of the highest devotee. All his sins are destroyed. He has no duties to perform. He is a perfected soul. He is the most blessed. To him the whole world appears as mere bliss. There is only the manifestation of supreme love. The gopis and the emperor Vali practised this love. Vali offered his self to God. The gopis lost themselves in Krishna. They lost themselves in God-consciousness and attained the Supreme.

The self-surrender must be totally unreserved, ungrudging and unconditional. The whole being should be surrendered. The subconscious, the ego, the mind, the intellect and the soul should be placed at the feet of the Divine. Only then will He take a seat in the heart of His devotee. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:62):

Tameva sharanam gachchha sarvabhaavena bhaarata.

Flee unto Him for shelter with all thy being, O Bharata.

What else does the *Bhagavad Gita* say about surrender?

Swami Sivananda: In the *Bhagavad Gita* (12:8) it states:

*Mayyeva mana aadhatsva mayi buddhim niveshaya;
Nivasishyasi mayyeva ata oordhvam na samshayah.*

Fix thy mind in Me only, thy intellect in Me; then you shall no doubt live in Me alone hereafter.

‘Fix thy mind’, your purposes and thoughts ‘in Me’, in God, in the Cosmic Form. Give up entirely all thoughts of sensual objects. ‘Fix in Me the intellect also’, the faculty which resolves and determines. What will the result be then? ‘You shall undoubtedly live in Me as Myself. O Arjuna’, of this there is no doubt whatsoever.

God becomes the slave of a bhakta only when the latter has made absolute, ungrudging self-surrender. God is cruel and puts His devotees to severe tests and trials. He did not hear the words of Draupadi so long as she kept up her own strength and traces of egoism. When she cried aloud, with

perfect sincerity and total resignation, “Dwarakanath, my beloved! Come to my rescue!” He ran to the scene and she had abundant clothing and her modesty was saved.

Generally, the aspirant, consciously or unconsciously, wittingly or unwittingly, does not wish to part completely with his desires and keeps some for his own gratification. Therefore, the self-surrender does not become perfect and unreserved, and so the grace of God does not descend. Even if there is an atom of desire or egoism, there is no possibility of divine grace.

What is the concept of surrender?

Swami Niranjanananda: What do aspirants need to surrender? As surrender deals with their spiritual identity, the first thing they have to do is surrender the ego and become innocent. If surrender represents the culmination of spiritual awakening, what they need to do is surrender their eccentricities of mind and develop discrimination, dispassion and creativity. If they need to surrender anything, they should surrender their selfishness. That is the true meaning of the word surrender.

The concept of surrender is to surrender one’s ego, idiosyncrasies and selfishness in order to be in tune with the inspiration that one receives from the guru and the divine. Surrendering means becoming innocent, not crooked. In the world one can be crooked, but in front of God and guru, one has to be innocent. That is real surrender.

As one transforms one’s nature, one becomes more aligned with the cosmic energy, and that cosmic energy becomes the guide. If a person wants to cross a river, he can’t swim straight across. He has to go with the current. If he struggles against the current, he won’t go anywhere, yet if he simply surrenders, the current will carry him. The swimmer can use the flow and the strength of that current to go where he wishes.

Are one's intellectual capabilities lessened by the act of surrender?

Swami Satyananda: Surrender should not be taken to mean that the intelligence of the subject is diminished. The subject understands everything but he does not exercise his intellect to oppose the operator. Doesn't a patient surrender to the doctor? Doesn't a subordinate submit to a superior? According to his nature, a person is usually taken in by a more qualified and highly developed person. A person desiring wealth is infatuated by a rich man. Similarly, a person wishing to acquire knowledge is taken in by a wise man, just as an artist is captivated by one who has fully mastered his art.

What does 'total' self-surrender mean?

Swami Satyananda: Neither by the practices of yoga, nor by the process of devotion, nor even by thoroughly acquiring scriptural knowledge does one realize Him; but simple and sincere self-surrender will lay open the doors of His abode for all times. Self-surrender alone is enough to accomplish the divine task of attaining His grace.

Total self-surrender is known as *atmanivedan* or presenting oneself completely to God. It can also be called *atmasamarpan* or self-surrender. This is the ninth and last stage of bhakti yoga. As it says in *Srimad Bhagavatam* (7:5:23 to 24):

Shravanam keertanam vishnoh smaranam paadasevanam.

Archanam vandanam daasyam sakhyamaatmanivedanam.

Iti punsaarpitaa vishnau bhaktishchennavalakshanaa.

Hearing, singing, remembering,
Service to His feet, worship, salutations,
Servant-like behaviour, friendliness
And surrender to Vishnu are the nine steps to bhakti.

Why is it necessary to give up all traces of ego and desires?

Swami Sivananda: Generally, the aspirant consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, keeps up some

desires for his secret gratification. He does not wish to part completely with his desires. Therefore, his surrender does not become perfect and unreserved, and grace does not descend in its fullest measure.

Desires, selfishness, attraction, repulsion and the idea of the body hang on egoism. Kill egoism! Then surrender will become complete. If there is even a tinge of egoism, the Divine will not reveal Himself.

Only when the devotee has completely offered up his ego, when he has made perfect self-surrender without any reservation or any secret desire for his gratification, when he thirsts like a fish out of water for meeting his Beloved, when he feels the separation from God intensely, when the fire of separation scorches him to the extreme degree, then and only then will God appear before the devotee. Then only will He wipe his tears, feed him with His own hands and carry him on His shoulders.

What is a description of the bhakta who has attained atma-nivedan?

Swami Sivananda: God is there who will look to everything which the aspirant cannot even dream of. He has no sensual craving, for he has no body as it is offered to God. He does not love or adore his body for it is God's business to see to it. He only feels the presence of God and nothing else. He is fearless, for God is helping him at all times. He has no enemy, for he has given himself up to God who has no enemies or friends. He has no anxiety for he has attained everything by attaining the grace of God. He has not even the thought of salvation; rather he does not want salvation, he merely wants God and nothing but God. He is satisfied with the love of God for by that there is nothing that is not attained. What is there to be attained, when God has sent His grace upon the devotee? The devotee does not want to become sugar but taste sugar. There is pleasure in tasting sugar, but not in becoming sugar itself. So the devotee feels that there is supreme joy more in loving God than becoming

God. God shall take complete care of the devotee. “I am Thine,” says the devotee.

What is the highest form of the surrender practised by great bhaktas?

Swami Satyananda: The surrender of a bhakta, a devotee of the calibre of Swami Sivananda or Christ and saints like Mirabai, was exceptional. They had completely given up their personal ego and they gave themselves into the hands of God, so God had to look after them. That is the highest surrender. When one is doing sadhana and one is associated with a guru or with a system of practice, one should practise it and not worry at all what the consequences will be, whether or not one will obtain a result. When one surrenders oneself to the Divinity, life becomes happy and glorious. Happiness or unhappiness, joy or sorrow, whether wishes are fulfilled or not will not matter because one has surrendered oneself to the will of the Divine, and whatever He brings into one's life is welcome. That is called surrender. Surrender means laying down one's arms.

What is the definition of surrender?

Swami Niranjanananda: Surrender cannot be defined. When one is deeply in love with somebody, can that state be defined? Or when one is experiencing intense fear, can one define it? No, it is not possible! How can one define the state of extreme fear, where there is total disconnection of body, brain and mind? The body becomes like jelly, the brain fuses and the mind disappears; it does not exist! Surrender is something like that – the mind fuses, the brain stops all its electrical activity, and there is no control of the body.

In the context of surrender, body does not mean the physical body but the interaction with the external world and the people around, life in the house, obligations and commitments to family and friends. That is the external aspect of one's life which is known as the body. When there is total surrender and the mind has been affected, there is a change of perception in the physical dimension and

an acceptance of reality. One tends to block out reality in times of suffering and frustration, but in surrender there is acceptance of reality.

‘When the brain stops its activity’, refers to the analytical process, the process which makes one tick in the manifest world. The mind represents the inner self which surrenders itself and becomes one with another higher Self. Once this surrender is complete it is also known as samadhi, enlightenment or nirvana. Surrender in itself is a sadhana. It is not an attitude of saying: ‘I give up my claim on my body, family and friends’.

When things seem to go from bad to worse, people say, “What am I doing here?” When they hold back like that, how can there be surrender? Surrender means being a sailboat and not a motor boat. In a sailboat one can only move as the wind moves one, and one can manipulate the boat to move according to the direction of the wind and eventually reach the shore. A motor boat tries to go against the current; it does not care about the wind but wants a feeling of independence and freedom.

Surrender is actually dependence on the wind, on the power of Prakriti, nature, and of Shiva, consciousness. As long as aspirants have their own motor boat they can never learn to surrender, because the engine will be kept running for as long as there is petrol, and when there is no petrol, no gas, they drift out to the sea and are lost. Surrender is a skill. Apart from being a sadhana, it is also mental awareness.

What is the real depth of surrender?

Swami Satyananda: People have a multitude of desires for different things, which can never be satisfied. Therefore, they become frustrated. Bhakti brings about satisfaction of all desires. The unquenchable thirst of desires is completely satiated. As Christ said (*John 4:14*):

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give

him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

In the state of *atmanivedanam* the individual, the bhakta surrenders to the divine will. Everything that happens, whether pleasure or pain, is seen as the divine law. The bhakta is a mere puppet. He owes his existence to the cosmic will.

Work, actions and experiences are regarded as tests and trials of the divine process, as a means to remove imperfections. One becomes receptive to divine grace, the grace of knowledge and bliss. This arises automatically when there is surrender and effacement of ego. This surrender is not easy. How many people could say the following from the depths of their being?

Father – I abandon myself into your hands.
Do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do . . . I thank you.
I am ready for all. I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me
And in all your creatures.
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I entrust my being;
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
For I love you, Lord, and so I need to give myself,
To surrender myself into your hands,
Without reserve and with boundless faith.

This was written by the Christian bhakta Frère Charles de Jesus. Very few people could honestly say these words with the corresponding intensity of feeling and understanding.

KAKA BHUSHUNDI

During the war in Lanka when Sri Rama was ensnared in the Nagapasha by Meghnad, Sage Narada sent the king of birds, the eagle Garuda to his rescue. Garuda immediately dealt with the snakes that made up the snare, yet a doubt arose in his mind, 'How can the all-powerful Almighty be caught like this by a demon? How can He be considered all-powerful?' Garuda visited many places and learned scholars to dispel his doubt yet did not find any satisfactory answers. Eventually it was Lord Shiva who directed him to the ashram of Kaka Bhushundi. The spiritual power of that ashram was so strong that Garuda's doubts melted away as soon as he entered the place. It was there that Garuda heard the whole story of Sri Rama from Kaka Bhushundi.

In an age long past, Bhushundi had taken birth as a shudra in Ayodhya. Due to a terrible drought that plagued the place, he went to live in Ujjain. There he was initiated into the Shiva mantra by an honourable and devoted Brahmin. In those days, Bhushundi's mind was under the sway of differentiation and division. Since he had become a worshipper of Shiva, he felt he was right to criticize and put down Vishnu, Rama and Krishna. His guru, the Brahmin, was a true saint and was greatly disturbed by this. He explained the essential unity of the Divine and tried to make Bhushundi see that Shiva and Vishnu were not separate from each other, that they were indistinguishable as they both adored each other. Shiva performed japa of the name of Rama. The guru told Bhushundi to abandon this wrong mentality and not persist in seeing Hari and Hara as different. He even said that criticizing one or the other is a grave crime for which one would suffer terrible consequences.

Bhushundi was not just stubborn, he was arrogant about his beliefs as well and disregarded his guru's teachings. Eventually he even started looking down upon his guru. One day, while seated in a Shiva temple and performing his japa, Bhushundi

ignored his guru who happened to come. He did not greet him or pay his respects. The guru, being a saintly person did not take any offence. However, Shiva was outraged by this rude and disrespectful behaviour. A heavenly voice proclaimed a curse upon Bhushundi that he would have to pass through a cycle of one thousand births of insect life.

When the guru heard this curse, he felt sorry for Bhushundi and begged Shiva to have mercy on this ignorant fellow. Shiva was touched by the guru's concern for this undeserving disciple and said that Bhushundi would suffer no pain during the cycle of births and deaths, that he would retain full memory of these events and that he would finally take birth as a Brahmin. During that last birth, he would be deeply devoted to Sri Rama and never face any obstacles in attaining the ultimate goal – the Divine.

According to the curse, Bhushundi passed through the many incarnations and was finally born as a Brahmin. Despite losing his parents at an early age, he was blessed with the grace of Shiva and had a trouble-free life. He visited the ashrams of many rishis and munis, and wherever he went he received the teachings of the formless, attributeless, ever-present Brahman. His heart, however, was focused on having darshan of the beautiful form of the Divine.

On his travels, he went to the ashram of Rishi Lomasha. Seeing him as a potential spiritual successor, Rishi Lomasha began instructing the young Brahmin boy in the mysteries of the *nirguna* or formless Brahman. Whenever the Rishi spoke of the formless eternal tattwa, Bhushundi would argue about the superiority of the divine form. He would ignore Rishi Lomasha's teaching and insist on asking for the means to attain the darshan of the divine form. Eventually Rishi Lomasha's patience ran out and he became furious with Bhushundi. He cursed him to inhabit the body of a crow and instantly Bhushundi turned into a black crow. He bowed down to Rishi Lomasha and seeking his blessings flew away.

Surprised by the humble acceptance of his curse, the Rishi called him back and initiated him into the *Rama* mantra, instructing him to meditate upon the form of Sri Rama as a child. He blessed Bhushundi that the presence of Rama would be constantly in his heart and said that Bhushundi could take on any form he wished, giving him also the boon to choose the time and mode of his death. Bhushundi would become imbued with knowledge and total renunciation and whichever ashram he would go to, there would be no ignorance around for miles. This with the blessing of his guru.

Kaka Bhushundi flew to the Neelanchal mountain. When Sri Rama was born, Bhushundi went to Ayodhya and was witness to the leelas of Rama's childhood until the age of five. His daily activities were performing japa, meditation, mental pooja and teaching the stories of God to the royal swans. It is said that even Shiva himself took the form of a royal swan and came to stay in Bhushundi's ashram to listen to the tales of Sri Rama.

The sermon given to Garuda by Kaka Bhushundi on the devotion to Rama is found in the Uttarkand of the *Ramacharitmanas* and is a testament to bhakti.

THE ART OF SURRENDER

Why has the flute become the symbol of surrender?

Swami Sivananda: Sri Krishna has preached *prem*, divine love, through his flute. Radha asked Krishna, "O my dear! Why do You love the flute more than me? What virtuous actions has it done so that it can remain in close contact with your lips? My Lord, I am eager to hear the secret of this." Sri Krishna said, "This flute is very dear to Me. It has some wonderful virtues. It has emptied itself of egoism. It has made its inner hollow quite void and I can bring out any kind of tune to my pleasure and sweet will. If you also behave towards me in exactly the same manner as this flute, if you remove your egoism completely and surrender

yourself perfectly, then I shall also love you in the same manner as I love this flute.”

This body also is the flute of Sri Krishna in the macrocosm. If egoism can be destroyed and total self-surrender, unreserved atmanivedan to the Divine made, merging the will with His will, He will play on this body-flute and bring out melodious tunes. He will work unhampered through the devotee’s instruments: the body, mind and senses. The devotee can rest peacefully without cares, worries and anxieties.

What can one expect after surrendering to a higher force?

Swami Satyananda: One has to accept whatever one gets. This is called the spirit of surrender. One should neither cry in sorrow, nor laugh in happiness, nor shout in illness, nor dance in pleasure. Whatever is received is all right. This is called *sharanagati*, the state of surrender. In this state one has no choice. One is a beggar. If I give a piece of stale bread, one has to accept it, not ask for fresh bread or buttered bread. One has to accept what is given or leave. This is the highest state of sadhana, but no one is able to do it in the present era.

In this sadhana, there is no need to sit in one place, no need to make up one’s mind, one does not even need a guru. Why? Because God is making him do this sadhana. He is his servant. When the master asks the servant to make tea, he makes it. When the master asks the servant to switch on the light or to switch off the fan, he just does it. In the same way, when He asks him to close his eyes and sing bhajans, he does it, even though he may not feel like doing it, because it is His order. In this sadhana, which is without pride or ego, the feeling is not that ‘I am doing it’, but that it is being done through me. Everyone should sing bhajan with this feeling, like a child, with innocence and humility. For one hour in the morning and for one hour in the evening, fulfil this service to God.

How does a person who has surrendered to God feel and experience?

Swami Satyananda: If today God has put me in the best position, with disciples and devotees who love me, with respect and honour, I would be very happy. But how will I feel if everything goes away, if everybody despises me and says, “Oh this swami is a bad man, kick him!” When times are good, people think it is God’s grace, but when times are bad, they say, “This is my destiny.” Why isn’t that also the grace of God?

Ananda, bliss, and *duhkha*, grief, must both be viewed equally by one who has become one with God. Therefore, it must be said, “God be with me, take away every fear, take away my children, take away my wife and husband, take away my property, take away all that is with me, my choice is You.” That has to come as the last point in life. It is most difficult. These things should not be decided mentally, they should happen automatically, naturally.

Does surrender mean giving up the responsibility of one’s own life thereafter?

Swami Niranjanananda: When one talks of giving up responsibilities one is thinking in terms of one’s social life, and giving up the responsibilities of social life is not surrender. Surrender has nothing to do with one’s social, mental, emotional or personal life. It is related to spiritual life, and this is where people confuse the idea of surrender. Some teachers have emphasized the need for surrender. I have known many people who have said that one needs to surrender all one’s wealth, property and family in order to be free to progress in spiritual life. That brand of mentality is a manipulative one which wants to amass wealth and power and gain control over other people. In the yogic tradition, Sivananda tradition or Satyananda tradition, it is not spoken of in this manner.

The social concept of surrender is not a spiritual concept, though it can be considered as an institutional concept.

Previously, in the sannyasa tradition people used to come to the guru's home and renounce whatever they had: clothes, money or other possessions. That renunciation was not surrender; it was a symbolic renunciation, "Okay, I have let go of my attachments and now you look after me." The guru would then provide them with clothes, food and finances to make journeys here and there, and look after their security and comfort. Out of this kind of renunciation a community evolved which was known as *gurukul* or the family of the guru.

What should one do when one cannot decide on a path for oneself?

Swami Satyananda: When one cannot decide a path for oneself, one should surrender completely to God. When there is indecisiveness, do not depend on the mind. At such times depend on a higher reality. It is my personal experience that when one prays and asks God for direction, He gives it. Of course, one has to be innocent. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:66), Sri Krishna said to Arjuna:

*Sarvadharmaanparityajya maamekam sharanam vraja;
Aham tvaa sarvapaapebhyo mokshayishyaami maa shuchah.*

Abandoning all duties, take refuge in Me (God) alone;
I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not.

When a person is unable to decide the next step in a difficult situation, then merely depending on reason or on the mind is not sufficient, because an erroneous decision can easily be made. It has been said in the *Ramacharitamanas* (Uttarakanda, after doha 78, chau 1 to 2):

*Hari sevakahi na byaapa abidyaa,
Prabhu prerita byaapai tehi bidyaa.
Taate naasa na hoi daasa kara,
Bheda bhagati baadhai bihangabara.*

Avidya (ignorance) can never take possession of the Lord's servant;

Impelled by the Lord, vidya (knowledge) takes the place of avidya.
The servant is never destroyed by ignorance and doubt;
Along with knowledge, his devotion continues to develop.

Is it possible to understand God's will?

Swami Sivananda: Divine will is mysterious, ever elusive, ever receding, subtle, inexpressible, invisible and yet all-pervading, knowable through intuition, devotion and purity. Only one who has surrendered unreservedly to God can know it as the source, the substratum and the ultimate goal of life. He bows his head in all humility and sincerity at the lotus feet of the Divine and receives His grace. The divine will is displayed in every inch of creation. Who provides food for the little frog living in-between the strata of rocks? Who clothed fruits with skin to prevent contamination from outside? The description of His glories is endless.

Divine will is an eternal, unalterable law. One who surrenders his individual will at the feet of the Divine will know the divine will, but self-surrender must be total, ungrudging and unreserved. Through total, unreserved self-surrender to God, every moment of life, every action and thought becomes consecrated to God. Atmanivedan, self-surrender, is the highest rung on the ladder of yoga. God is immanent in this world and also transcendent. God creates the world and remains as its inner ruler. The first sloka of the *Ishavasya Upanishad* begins with: "All movable and immovable objects in this universe are indwelt by the Divine." In the *Kathopanishad* it says: "This God is hidden in all things." Only one who is able to truly surrender to Him is able to appreciate and live according to His will.

The upanishadic seers have spoken highly of the *veera* or brave aspirants who place their entire existence in the divine will. One who has attained that has nothing more to long for. Such a devotee lives for Him and Him alone. When surrender is complete, God takes complete charge of the

devotee and looks after his welfare. He reveals to him His play and His will in the world. The aspirant should strictly adhere to the will of God. He should not turn aside on account of hardships or egoistic inclinations. By following the divine will of inner revelation, the light will shine more and more, and will grow into a blazing fire of wisdom and union with God.

Should one ask God for anything after surrendering to Him?

Swami Satyananda: When the heart has become pure through proper management, God will live in it. One will find that one's destiny, the direction of one's life rests in the hands of God. It is said, *Dinabandhu dinanath, meri dori tere hath –* "O Friend and Lord of the poor, You hold the string of my life." Whether God takes one to the butcher's or turns one into a deity in a temple, one has given over the strings of one's life to Him. If one completely surrenders to God, nothing is impossible, but don't put conditions on the act of surrender. Don't say, "I worship you, so look after me." He is omniscient; He controls mind, prana, limbs, life and death. Is He so foolish that He needs to be told to remove the devotee's sorrows? He has given sorrow, joy, wealth, poverty, illness, He knows everything. He is all-powerful, all-pervading. He has the three gunas of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. He is present everywhere; He knows everything; He can do anything. In principle this is accepted, yet one doubts Him. If one truly believed that He is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent, one would not feel the need to ask Him for anything. One would leave it up to Him.

When does one truly feel protected by God?

Swami Satyananda: Give yourself over to God now. Resolve to let God do whatever He does. One may do japa on waking in the morning, visit a temple during the day, chant the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Ramayana*, or participate in satsang, but

the real thing is to be able to say to God that one is unable to do anything now and is handing over the key of one's vehicle to Him. One who surrenders himself completely to God is protected by God.

What is the test of surrender?

Swami Satyananda: I heard a voice and I followed it because I liked it. It was to my liking, so I came to Rikhia. What if, at that time, I had heard the words, "Satyananda, go and marry!" Well, I definitely do not like marriage and I always pray that when I am born again and my first cry is heard, may my mother say, "O son, you are pure, enlightened, stainless and beyond the maya of the world. I give you sannyasa; you will not marry." I want to be born of such a mother who has the guts to reject common ambitions. If she should tell me to marry, I would not like it. That means I fail in surrender; I do not follow her words because I do not like them.

The test of surrender is that perhaps one will not be able to manage it. One wants surrender but supposing one gets it, what will one do? In surrender, everything is not beautiful, comfortable and pleasing. It is a trying situation when God tries one's true nature. Kabir has aptly remarked:

His is the house of love,
Not the house of your aunt.
Only he can enter here
Who takes off his head
And carries it in his hands.

What is prapatti?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is only one way to realize bhakti and that is prapatti, sharanagati or samarpan, complete surrender. The intense emotion, the strong restlessness and urge to give oneself over to God is called *prapatti*. In prapatti, in sharanagati, in samarpan, the devotee has no thought other than that of the divine.

Once, Emperor Akbar was hunting in the woods. When it was time for namaz, he spread out his prayer mat and settled down for worship. While the emperor was offering namaz, a young tribal girl came walking through the trees and passed by, walking upon his prayer mat. Emperor Akbar continued doing namaz; however, upon finishing he ordered his soldiers to catch the girl. The soldiers brought the girl before the emperor.

Emperor Akbar asked, "Are you blind? Didn't you see where you were walking? I was offering namaz and you walked across my mat. Didn't you see the prayer mat?" In a voice trembling with fear the girl said, "Maharaja, please forgive me, I made a mistake. I will never again commit such a blunder." The emperor asked, "What were you thinking of at the time?" The girl replied, "Maharaja, do not be angry if I tell the truth. I was thinking of my lover, as I was going to meet him. I didn't know where my steps were falling. My sight was filled with only the picture of my lover. My heart was filled with restlessness to meet him. You too were offering love to your Beloved; however, your eyes were everywhere, whereas mine were only on my lover, and that is why I committed such a mistake."

When the emperor heard this, his eyes opened. He said, "Give this girl money and set her free. She has told me how one should be attached to one's lover." A person should be completely absorbed in bhakti. If one can be as absorbed in the love of God as one is in worldly passion then *moksha* or liberation can be attained.

Prapatti has two aspects: one is *sharanagati*, taking refuge, and the other is *samarpan*, self-surrender. The devotee may have control over the personal practice of bhakti yoga; however, acquiring prapatti is controlled by God. It will happen only when He so desires. Yet, if a person is ready then it will not take long. When one goes for a job interview, one takes all the degrees and certificates. The interviewer first looks at all the papers, and then he asks questions. If one goes without any papers, unprepared, then the

interviewer will tell one to go away and return only with all the documents.

To walk the path of bhakti yoga is every person's own decision and dharma. If in the process of bhakti yoga one does not try to remove the six obstructions and does not try to attain prapatti, sharanagati and samarpan, bhakti is of no use. If one eats, it is to fill the stomach. If one drinks water, it is to quench one's thirst. Similarly, if one practises bhakti yoga, the aim is to take refuge in and surrender oneself to God.

Bhakti yoga begins by focusing on the divine. It begins when attainment of the divine becomes the goal. However, one has to prepare oneself to reach the state of sharanagati and samarpan. When one can remove the defects of life, God Himself will grace the devotee with prapatti. The one thus graced thinks, 'I belong to God, therefore God Himself will look after me.' Practising bhakti yoga is in the hands of the bhakta; however, to attain prapatti, to achieve the state of sharanagati and samarpan remains in the hands of God. That is why there should only be one sentiment in a bhakta's heart:

*Aba to dee hai nariyaa nadi men bahaa, jaa lagee jisa kinaare
chale jaayenge;
Aba to karunaa kee jaba bhee chalegee havaa, jaa lagee jisa
kinaare chale jayenge.*

Now that I have floated my boat on the river, whichever
bank it reaches there I will go;
Now whenever the wind of compassion blows, wherever
it puts me down there I will flow.

What are the obstacles a bhakta must overcome on the path to total self-surrender?

Swami Satyananda: The obstacles that stand in the way of self-surrender are desires and egoism. The self-surrender must be totally unreserved, ungrudging and unconditioned. Sometimes the devotee keeps certain desires for his own

gratification. That is why he is not able to perfect self-surrender and have the *darshan*, inner vision, of his deity. The ego is stiff and obstinate, like hard granite. It has to be split by constant hammering with the chisel of bhakti. When a necklace is made, the hard diamond must be pierced and a slender wire passed through the hole. Even so, this hard heart must be pierced through self-surrender and the slender thread of bhakti must be passed through the hole. Only then will God take His seat in the heart of His devotee.

PROCESS OF SURRENDER

What are the stages of surrender?

Swami Sivananda: The development of vairagya and discrimination is the beginning of self-surrender. These qualities have to be carefully and consciously cultivated. They do not come in a day, but gradually can be developed by faithful practice, dispassion, serenity and self-control. Surrender is not a thing that is done in a week or a month. The devotee cannot make total surrender from the very beginning of the sadhana. In the beginning individual effort is necessary.

Once the aspirant becomes fit to tread the spiritual path, a firm resolve to surrender oneself to God or guru is the second step. A sadhaka must be ready to dedicate his life in entirety for the service of his teacher, the service of humanity or for attaining self-realization. When the aspirant goes to his preceptor and falls at his feet, the seed of surrender which was sown with vairagya germinates.

The third stage is when the aspirant starts service of his guru. He does not perform any action which can be considered as selfish. As he advances in his devotion and service, his surrender becomes more and more perfect and complete. His heart becomes purer and purer, and gradually the light of knowledge dawns in him. He realizes the supreme atman which pervades everything. Thus through service of one's preceptor with utter self-dedication, the heart becomes purified, and ultimately God becomes the preceptor.

What is required before self-surrender can take place?

Swami Satyananda: Before self-surrender can take place, the entire personality has to be rearranged. For surrender, innocence is required, but everybody has lost their innocence. The heart, mind and intellect have become tough and rigid.

How can one have an unflinching resolve and devotion to God?

Swami Niranjanananda: Rather than having unflinching devotion to God, which is far away from everybody, how about unflinching awareness of one's aim in life, which will keep one on track all the time? God will not keep one on track all the time. It has never been seen that He or She keeps anybody on track all the time, despite He or She being the controller of everybody's destiny. They cannot control anybody. So it is better that one just controls one's behaviours and aspirations in life, and that will take one to the Divine, whoever it may be.

So these tests are not meant to punish, but to purify?

Swami Sivananda: Once a saint living in Puri who had completely dedicated himself to Hari was seriously ailing with chronic dysentery. He became quite helpless. Hari of Puri had been serving him for months in the form of a servant. The law of karma is inexorable and nobody can escape this infallible law. God did not want the bhakta to take another birth to exhaust his karma, so His devotee had to suffer from a protracted ailment. This was his karmic purgation, but God Himself served him, as the devotee had surrendered completely. This is the unbounded mercy of the Divine. He becomes a slave of His devotees when they depend upon Him entirely.

The lower nature must be thoroughly overhauled. When old wrong habits are completely destroyed, the surrender becomes complete. Do not make plans and speculations. Keep the mind and the intellect passive. Allow divine will

and grace to work through the mind and senses. Become silent. Feel His grace and love and enjoy the divine ecstasy. Be at ease. Pray to God fervently, “O Lord! Make my will strong to resist all temptations, to control my senses and lower nature, to change my old evil habits and to make my surrender complete and real. Enthroned Thyself in my heart. Do not leave this place even for one second. Use my body, mind and organs as instruments. Make me fit to dwell in Thee forever.”

How does Sri Krishna try to help Arjuna?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna repeatedly tells Arjuna to surrender himself. Arjuna says, “You keep telling me to surrender. How can I do this, what do I offer?” Sri Krishna says, “Surrender your mind to Me.” Arjuna says, “That is difficult. I have not been able to quieten the mind up to this day. My mind always thinks about Duryodhana and Duhshasana, and about my troubles. Now, as I stand on the battlefield, it is thinking of all that. It is impossible for me to still my mind. Is there any other remedy?”

Sri Krishna says, “If you cannot still the mind, then at least you can think with your intellect that ‘I am offering everything to God’. Give your intellect to Me. If you cannot offer with your feelings, at least you can pretend to offer with your intellect. This will help you realize that I exist. Once you know that I exist, your intellect will be attracted to Me time and again.”

Arjuna says, “If my intellect was in the right place, why would I ask you this question to begin with? You are saying that I should give my intellect to You, but my intellect is in turmoil. If my intellect was balanced, I would not sink into depression; I would not forget my duty. How can I possibly connect this confused intellect? Show me another way.”

Sri Krishna says, “Fine, do not connect your mind, do not connect your intellect, just be with Me.” What is the meaning of ‘be with Me’? It is faith which must be so strong that one

can be with the supreme spirit all the time, without using the mind or the intellect.

What does one do with one's faults?

Swami Niranjanananda: The important point emphasized in Chapter 9 of the *Bhagavad Gita* is that surrender is best in whatever aspirants do. What do they surrender? Their whole selves. How do they surrender? In everything they do, they try and offer it to the Divine as much as they can. Some people say there is a problem here and the answer to that problem is given in Chapter 10.

If there is something really bad about oneself, how can one surrender it? Why should one surrender it to God whom one holds in high esteem? Why should one give Him all one's rubbish? Surely, one should only give Him one's best. The reason for giving Him one's rubbish is that even bad things can be accepted as His blessings. There is an understanding behind this view which makes one realize that within there is also the capacity of doing bad. Naturally, one must try to transcend that, as ultimately there is no distinction between Him and oneself. That is what the scriptures say, and one has to try to experience it. These two viewpoints are not opposing ideas. They are both valid, of equal importance and complementary, as a bhakta always wants to give the best. With that comes the effort to transform, to change the bad into a purposeful good and offer that.

Another nature of the bhakta is seeing everything as part of the Highest Self. The entire nature is governed by the three gunas. If *tamas* is strongest, actions are *tamasic*, and if one suddenly becomes aware that the actions are *tamasic*, ask the question, "How can I offer this?" One has to change to *sattwa*! Once *sattwa* arises, there is a state of natural compatibility in which the aspect of surrender is the final stage. This is surrender of the limiting self-identity, *ahamkara*, and this can only happen when there is realization or awareness of the higher nature. It does not happen at the level of ideas, but as a realization. One begins with an idea, one follows the process

associated with the idea and ultimately it becomes what one knows and realizes. Therefore, Sri Krishna says (10:8):

*Aham sarvasya prabhavo mattah sarvam pravartate;
Iti matvaa bhajante maam budhaa bhaavasamanvitaah.*

I am the origin of all; from Me everything evolves.
Understanding this, the wise worship Me with full devotion.

What is the importance of sadhana in bringing the devotee closer to surrender?

Swami Satyananda: One should read the Upanishads, the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Yoga Vasishtha*, but these will not further one's spiritual path. They may cleanse the mind and give it a structure, but what one is searching for is within and it is even closer than one's prana. A devotee has said:

He is to be found in every garden of the world,
But He hides in the curtain of flowers.

Whatever sadhana is done, do it as an act of surrender. Do not think: what will happen if I do this, that or the other? If sadhana cannot be done with a feeling of surrender, there should not be feelings of guilt. Sometimes sadhana becomes madness. That is not the way, because the main purpose in sadhana is the experience of God. Kabirdas says:

Japa, austerity, self-control and sadhana
Are all included within remembrance.
Kabir says that the devotee of Sri Rama
Knows fully well there is nothing like remembrance.
One should practise remembrance like the cow
Who while grazing anywhere never forgets her calf.

Which mantras can help the process of self-surrender?

Swami Sivananda: Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "Abandoning all duties, come to Me alone for shelter; sorrow not, I will liberate you from all sins." This is a powerful

sharanagati mantra that will help the devotee in effecting self-surrender if he keeps the *bhava* or feeling of this sloka constantly before his mind.

This corresponds to the sharanagati mantras: *Sri Ramah sharanam mama* – ‘I surrender myself to Sri Rama’ of devotees of Sri Rama; *Sri Krishnah sharanam mama* – ‘I surrender myself to Sri Krishna’ of bhaktas of Sri Krishna; *Shreeman Narayanacharanau sharanam prapadye* – ‘I surrender myself to Narayana’ of bhaktas of Hari. Those who repeat the above mantras with *bhava* will obtain the grace of God soon. They will be able to accomplish perfect self-surrender. *Shishyasteham shadhi mantvam prapannam* – ‘I am Thy disciple, suppliant to Thee, teach me’ is also a sharanagati mantra. If it is repeated with sincerity and *bhava*, Sri Krishna’s grace will descend.

Repetition of the following formulae will also help in making perfect self-surrender: “I am Thine, my Lord, all are Thine. Thy will be done.” Even if it is said once from the core of the heart, from the central, inner being, with one-pointed devotion, with one hundred percent of the mind or sixteen annas of the mind – “I am Thine, my Lord,” the gulf that separates one from God will be bridged at once. The mind, heart, intellect and soul should combine harmoniously in effecting the surrender. Only then will the self-surrender be true, complete and perfect.

How does the bhakta attain self-surrender?

Swami Satyananda: In the Indian tradition, bhakti yoga is considered the easiest path to samarpan. Swami Sivananda used to say, “Bhakti is the easiest, safest, cheapest, quickest and best path.” As the *vasanas*, desires, of the world are dropped, the *vasanas* of the Divine have to be awakened. Worldly *vasanas* have to be replaced with divine ones. One cannot be free from desire until the very end of one’s existence as an individual soul. However, a destructive desire can be replaced with a creative one, a restrictive desire transformed into an expansive one. By repeating the mantra

and the sankalpa every day, the feeling of bhakti will arise from deep within and grow day by day. Bhakti yoga can become a major support in the perfection of surrender. Like the saints and sages who sang and wrote about the glory of the Supreme in their devotional songs and poetry, the devotee will experience bhakti in every sphere of existence and know the exquisite feeling of unity.

Another important factor is trust. Without trust, one will remain afraid. If there is trust, there is the knowledge that one will be taken care of. The devotee knows he is loved, he can feel it, and that is important. It is not just a technique. Everyone is loved because they are part of the whole. To be able to deal with trying situations requires absolute trust and devotion. Devotion is the nature of the strength within. Devotion and trust fuel one's strength and allow one to cope. Devotion to God, love for God, is the ultimate sadhana in the road to samarpan.

Self-surrender is not just the thought of surrendering; it is an inborn quality. Why be so tense about surrender? Surrender is spontaneous. If a person wants to rise, he has to use energy, force and strain, but if he wants to fall down, nothing has to be done. One does not need to use strength; instead one has to lose it and just fall down. The more worried a person is about surrender, the less likely he is to attain it. Surrender happens spontaneously. No one should worry about surrender, but only worry about satsang, bhakti and discovering one's relationship with God.

What is the way recommended in the *Bhagavad Gita* for the devotee to surrender himself to the Divine?

Swami Sivananda: In the *Bhagavad Gita* (9:27) it says:

*Yatkaroshi yadashnaasi yajjuhoshi dadaasi yat;
Yattapasyasi kaunteya tatkurushva madarpanam.*

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever you practise as austerity, O Arjuna, do as an offering unto Me.

Consecrate all acts to God and then there will be freedom from the bondage of karma – there will be freedom in action. One who tries to live in the spirit of this verse will be able to surrender to God. Gradually he ascends the spiritual path step by step. His greedy nature is slowly dissolved now. He always gives; he is not eager to take. His whole life with all its actions, thoughts and feelings is dedicated to the service of God eventually. He lives for God only. There is not a bit of egoism now. His whole nature is transformed into divinity. When actions are dedicated to the Divine there is no rebirth. This is the simplest method of yoga. Do not waste time any longer. Take it up from today.

All actions, results and rewards will go to the Divine. There is no separate living for the individual. Just as the river joins the sea, abandoning its own name and form, so also the individual soul joins the Supreme Soul, giving up its own name and form, its own egoistic desires and egoism. The individual will has become one with the cosmic will. Whatever one does of their own sweet will, whatever one offers in sacrifice as enjoined in the scriptures, whatever one gives, whatever austerities one does, do all these as an offering unto Me.

Who does one surrender to and how is this surrender accomplished?

Swami Niranjanananda: Surrender is not something that one can think about; it is something that happens naturally and spontaneously. Nobody can cultivate surrender, and therefore it is useless to think about how to surrender. Surrender is an outcome.

Faith plus belief equals surrender. That is the simple formula. If one can cultivate faith and belief, surrender will happen naturally and spontaneously. Milarepa did not think about surrender. He had faith and belief. That faith and belief led him to purity of mind, honesty and truthfulness, freed him from personal desires and expectations and allowed him to focus on maintaining the purity of that faith and belief.

People associate the word faith with God. Faith in God is the last thing, not the first. The Sanskrit word for faith is *shraddha*. The literal meaning of the word shraddha is 'living in truth'. What does it mean to live in truth? First of all, one tries to cultivate the faculty of honesty – honesty to oneself and not hiding behind any mask that one puts on, instead seeing things clearly and knowing what the truth of that situation and moment is. If one can become aware of truth at each moment, experience the truth of the moment, and become part of the truth of the moment, then that is cultivation of faith – living in truth moment to moment, to moment.

This eventually changes the mental behaviour in relation to the senses and sense objects. When one is influenced by the senses and the sense objects, one is the doer, the enjoyer, the centre of one's life. When one is living truth moment to moment, the understanding develops that one is not the doer. Just as the harmonium is played, for the harmonium by itself cannot create a sound. If, while the harmonium is being played, it thinks 'I am the doer', then the harmonium is incorrect. After all, no one is controlling moments and situations, for it is destiny which is controlling everything. No matter what one does, ultimately one will discover that one is being controlled by a different force, a different power, and one is being guided by that.

People can desire something, have their choices, yet ultimately they receive what is destined. The idea of 'I am the doer', or 'I am the enjoyer', is gradually and slowly changed when they begin to live the truth moment to moment. With the change of this idea, aspirants become the *drashta*, the observer. After they have become the drashta of their moment-to-moment living they develop an awareness, an understanding, an idea that 'All right, if I am being played, then let the best music come from me'.

Another stage of faith is, 'Let Thy will be done, for I am not the doer, I am not the enjoyer, I am being played by a higher power. Since I am being played let Thy music flow through me.' This is the culmination of shraddha and faith.

Belief is knowing and realizing that one shall overcome one day. That is the conviction or *vishwas*. Belief or conviction can only become strong if there is clarity in thought. This is one area where most people fail; they don't know what to believe in. There is always a question or a doubt that creeps in. Milarepa believed in following explicitly the guidelines that he had been given by somebody whom he held in high esteem – his guru. He did not allow his mental negativities to colour the instructions or the desire of the guru.

Surrender is an impossible achievement for ordinary people, for they do not have that type of mindset. However, if they cultivate shraddha plus vishwas, faith plus belief, then the outcome of these two is surrender.

How important is humility in the process of self-surrender?

Swami Sivananda: How can God's grace be obtained without humility and ungrudging, unreserved and unconditional self-surrender to Him? God knows what is good for a person better than he does. To resign oneself absolutely to His will is an even higher form of worship than visiting temples, shaking the bell and carrying out all sorts of ritualistic ceremonies. God does not want external show. He wants your heart, so say once more, "Thy will be done. I am Thine. All is Thine" from the bottom of your heart.

Close the eyes. Destroy the desires of body, world and book lore. Withdraw the mind. Reduce yourself to zero before God. Merge in Him. Only then will He completely take care of and guide you, only then will surrender become complete. Forget personal interests, longings and desires. The lower self must be sacrificed to have union with God. Empty the ego and be filled with God. God will be realized when one loses one's personality.

How do the various branches of yoga lead to samarpan?

Swami Satyananda: In every form of spiritual practice, the last stage is where the practitioner has offered his individual

identity to a higher force, so that he can merge with it. In every sadhana, samarpan is the final experience of the *jiva*, the individual self, before becoming one with the *Paramatma*, the Supreme Self.

In raja yoga there are eight stages to achieve union: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. The last stage of samadhi is *asmita*, where the ego and the sense of individuality are completely dissolved; the lower consciousness is transformed and merged with the higher consciousness. This, too, is samarpan.

Jnana yoga reaches its culmination when there is full experiential knowledge of the merger with higher consciousness. Similarly, when karma yoga is perfected, the ego is eliminated; then the feeling is: *Na ham karta, Hari karta, Hari karta hi kevalam* – “I am not the doer, the supreme consciousness is the performer.” When this total surrender of the karmas happens, without any ego-identification or sense of gain, then purity of mind, action, speech and thought is experienced. Such a state of purity ultimately takes one to unknown dimensions.

In bhakti yoga, nine stages have been defined: *shravana*, hearing God’s stories and satsang; *kirtan*, singing His glories; *smarana*, constant remembrance of His name and presence; *padaseva*, service of His feet; *archana*, ritual worship of God with or without form; *vandana*, prostration and prayer to God; *dasya*, cultivating the attitude of a servant to God; *sakhya*, cultivating the attitude of a friend to God; and *atmanivedana*, complete surrender of the Self. The final stage, atmanivedan, is samarpan, yielding completely to God. In the *Ramacharitamanas*, it has been said: “By systematic practice of *navadha bhakti*, the nine stages of bhakti yoga, a point of total self-surrender can be attained.” In the final stage of bhakti yoga there is fusion, total identification and oneness with the object of contemplation, along with dissolution of the external nature. This is samarpan, surrender.

What is the outcome of surrender?

Swami Sivananda: The secret of surrender is giving up all ideas of duty and responsibility and allowing the divine will to work unhampered. The bhakta will feel a changed being. This exalted state is ineffable. A great transformation will come upon one. One will be enveloped by a halo of divine effulgence. One will be drowned in indescribable bliss, peace and joy. The old little self is dead now. One is now a changed spiritual being. The individual will is merged in the cosmic will. One is now illumined by the divine light. All ignorance has melted now. Enjoy the immortal, divine life wherein there is neither despair nor fear, neither hunger nor thirst, neither doubt nor delusion.

Self-surrender is only another name for effacement of the ego. The essential characteristics of devotion are the consecration of all activities by total self-surrender to God and extreme anguish if the Divine were to be forgotten.

Through self-surrender the devotee becomes one with the personal God or *saguna Brahman*, just as through self-denial the vedantic student or aspirant on the path of jnana yoga becomes one with the impersonal Absolute. The greater the capacity for surrender to God, the greater joy there will be. Surrender the ego at the lotus feet of the Lord and seek satisfaction only in doing His will. If one thinks and speaks of one's own ability, the grace of God will not come. The grace descends on a humble soul who always says, "God does everything. I am an instrument in His hands."

What does the devotee have to give up when he surrenders to God's will?

Swami Sivananda: There is no loss in self-surrender. The aspirant receives everything from God. He enjoys the divine powers of God. The whole wealth of the Divine belongs to him. Supernatural and psychic powers will roll under his feet. He becomes one with the Divine. He is freed from all wants, desires and cravings. The spiritually hungry and thirsty aspirant who yearns for the vision of God turns

towards the divine and is quite willing, eager and happy to consecrate his body, life, mind and soul at the feet of the Lord.

If there is total, unreserved self-surrender to God every moment of one's life, every little action and every movement of the mind will become consecrated to God. One will live for Him and Him alone. When the surrender is complete God takes complete charge of the devotee and looks after his welfare. He reveals to him His play in the world.

The devotee should give up obstinate ways and accept the way of the divine. He should annihilate the self-assertive rajasic ego by increasing sattwa and developing humility. One should not bother about taking care of the body. God will save it if He needs it for further service. Surrender it at His feet and rest in peace. He will take care of it. A real devotee says, "It does not matter if I take millions of births, but let me be attached to the lotus feet of the Lord. Let me have spontaneous devotion to the Divine. Let me be endowed with purity, spiritual strength, the spirit of selfless service and divine virtues."

How does a devotee who has surrendered everything to God function in the world?

Swami Sivananda: In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (sutra 61) it is said:

Lokahaanau chintaa na kaaryaa niveditaatmalokavedatvaat.

The bhakta should feel no anxiety about worldly concerns, as he has consecrated himself, the world as well as the Vedas to the Lord.

The devotee need not worry if his affairs go wrong, because his self, worldly affairs and even the Vedas have been surrendered to the Divine. The devotee should have complete trust in God, even when they apparently go the wrong way. Really, neither loss nor evil can touch him for he is under the care and protection of a loving and omnipotent

God. He must take no notice of worldly gain or loss. He is not concerned with what he achieves in the world or what he loses. The devotee has surrendered himself as well as his temporal and spiritual concerns to God. Therefore, he should not worry about worldly losses. What need has he to worry about things of the world?

When the devotee has surrendered himself to God, God removes his anxieties. He takes away the mind of his devotee. How can he worry about the loss in the absence of the mind? This sutra does not advocate hardness of heart or indifference to human suffering. It does not condemn the charitable acts and philanthropic work of large-hearted people. It emphasizes only one point: *chinta na karya* – no anxiety or worry is to be entertained.

How else are obstacles revealed in the process of complete self-surrender?

Swami Sivananda: Obstinacy is a great obstacle to surrender. The lower nature again and again rises up to assert itself. There is a resurrection of desires. Desires become suppressed for some time, but again they manifest with redoubled force. Aspirants are dragged hither and thither by these desires. That is the reason why they do not make any substantial progress on the spiritual path even after doing sadhana for many years.

The self-arrogating little ego persists and resists again and again. It clings leech-like to its old habits, cravings and desires. It wages guerrilla war. It resists surrender. It demands certain objects for its secret gratification and keeps subtle desires for its own silent appeasement. Introspect and find out the subtle desires that lurk in the corners of the heart through the searchlight of concentration and discrimination, and kill them ruthlessly through regular, silent meditation.

The ego is vulgar and obstinate. It is very difficult to melt it. Constant vigilance and ceaseless effort is necessary to slay this dire enemy of peace and wisdom. If the mind says, “I am Thine my Lord,” if buddhi says, “I am Mr So-and-so, I

know everything, I am a powerful judge,” if the subconscious says, “I must have the psychic power to get whatever I want,” and if the soul says, “I am a great devotee,” one is only a hypocrite. No kind of self-surrender has been made. Beware of moral and spiritual pride. Maya assumes various subtle forms. The moral and spiritual pride of aspirants is more dangerous than the ordinary pride of wealth, power and position of worldly-minded persons.

It is mere foolishness to expect God to do one's self-surrender. The devotee will have to do the self-surrender himself.

How does a person who has surrendered to God view the ups and downs of life?

Swami Satyananda: One of the things I have seen in my life is, “God's will will be done.” To become God's instrument, one has to make oneself empty, just like the flute. Only then can He play, otherwise it is not possible. So if the devotee is to become an instrument, he has to be completely different and say, “Whatever happens to me, let it happen. Even if I had cancer I would accept it and not fight. If I were to have diabetes, I would accept it and not fight. For me, the choice is grace. I have to make a choice between grace and health.”

It is difficult to surrender to God. It is a difficult technique and it is always in my mind, for the more I can illuminate myself, the more the grace will flow and the little ‘I’ must go. Then the big ‘I’ will dwell in me. I am aware of it all the time. Often I am unable to see the way. I understand it on the mental plane, but it is not a mental business, it is experience. It is not imagining that I am a lotus, I have to become a lotus. It is not imagining I surrender, but knowing how to surrender. Even prostrating is not surrender. One has to say, “His will be done.”

How does atmanivedan relate to total surrender?

Swami Niranjanananda: The ninth form of bhakti yoga is atmanivedan, total surrender, total fusion, total merger. *Atma* means ‘self’ and *nivedan* means ‘to offer’. It happens when

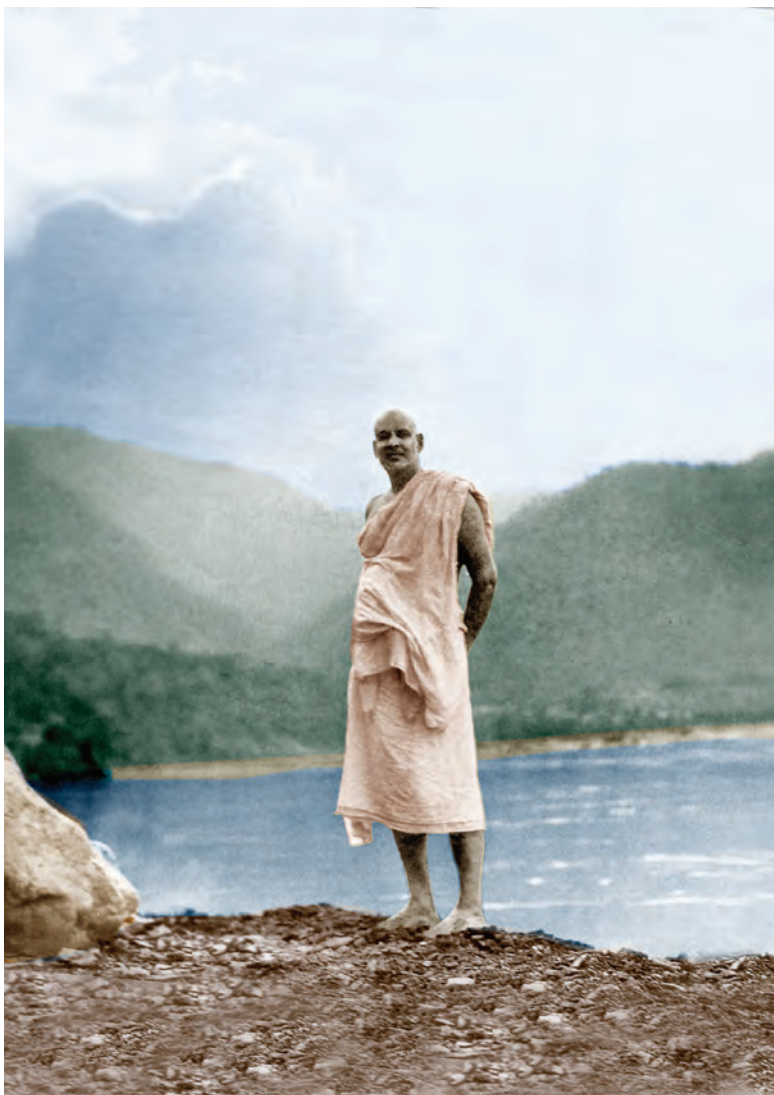
the last vestige of individual identity is dissolved in cosmic awareness. It can occur physically too. As one goes through the various processes of bhakti yoga, it is the mind and body which evolve. Each and every atom of the body becomes enlightened. The atoms dissolve in the environment.

There is the story of Mirabai. In the last moment of her life, her physical body disappeared into the image of her Lord, Sri Krishna. When Chaitanya Mahaprabhu went to Puri and saw the statue of Jagannath, his body dissolved into that statue. Kabir was the guru of both Hindus and Muslims. When he died, the Hindus wanted to cremate him but the Muslims wanted to bury him. So they started to fight. However, when they removed the cloth which was covering his body, they found only flowers, and both communities shared the flowers half and half.

This is not mere spiritual fantasy. If it were only spiritual fantasy it would go against every kind of spiritual theory, the theory of enlightenment. When one feels hungry, is it the body which is hungry or is it the mind? When one fills the stomach, is the body fulfilled or is the mind fulfilled? It is a linked experience. Similarly, in the state of enlightenment there is not only transformation of the mind, or expansion of consciousness, but also enlightenment of the body. At that level the body becomes God. Consciousness is God, yet the body also becomes God and dissolves. This is the other shakti of God. In maya, the body becomes animal, prey to the influence of the instincts. In bhakti, the body becomes God, experiencing cosmic unity.

Atmanivedan is not that easy to attain. One cannot fill one's stomach just by thinking about food; one cannot quench one's thirst just by thinking about water. There is a whole process involved. Even if there is water in a glass, one needs to hold it, lift it up, and bring it to the lips. Many things are happening at the same time. Atmanivedan is definitely not something which one can attain just by thinking or aspiring to it. However, if faith becomes powerful and takes one to that real experience of atmanivedan, one

will cease to be of this world. If one stands under the shower with clothes on and hopes that only the body will get wet, it will not work out. One will be drenched all over. It is the same with atmanivedan.



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4. Contentment – Living the Peace of the Soul

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BHAGAVAD GITA

1. Remembrance – Feeling the Divine Presence

- (12:2) Those who, fixing their minds on Me, worship Me, ever steadfast and endowed with supreme faith, these are the best in yoga in My opinion. 25
- (10:25) Among yajnas I am japa yajna 39

3. Seeing Divinity in Everything

- (6:29) The impartial individual, immersed in yoga, sees all living beings in himself and himself in all living beings. 105

5. Let Thy Will Be Done

- (18:62) Flee unto Him for shelter with all thy being, O Bharata. 153
- (12:8) Fix thy mind in Me only, thy intellect in Me; then you shall no doubt live in Me alone hereafter. 153
- (18:66) Abandoning all duties, take refuge in Me (God) alone; I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not. 165
- (10:8) I am the origin of all; from Me everything evolves. Understanding this, the wise worship Me with full devotion. 175
- (9:27) Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever you practise as austerity, O Arjuna, do as an offering unto Me. 177

BIBLE

5. Let Thy Will Be Done

- (John 4:14) But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. 158

NARADA BHAKTI SUTRAS

3. Seeing Divinity in Everything

- (sutra 73) Because they are all His own. 103

5. Let Thy Will Be Done

- (sutra 61) The bhakta should feel no anxiety about worldly concerns, as he has consecrated himself, the world as well as the Vedas to the Lord. 183

RAMACHARITAMANAS

1. Remembrance – Feeling the Divine Presence

(Sundarkand, after doha 31, chau 2)

O Lord, said Hanuman,

Whenever I do not remember Thee

Or recite Thy name

That is the period of my distress. 30

(Kishkinda, after doha 9, chau 2)

Birth after birth the munis keep trying;

Still the name of Rama

Does not come from their mouths

At the time of death. 30

(Balakanda, doha 26)

The name of Rama

Is the wish fulfilling tree.

It is the source of blessings in Kali Yuga.

By remembering the name,

Tulsidas was transformed

From bhang into holy tulsi! 51

2. Restraint and Graceful Action

(Uttarakand, after doha 40, chau 1) There is no dharma superior
to doing good to others,

And no meanness worse than troubling others. 85

5. Let Thy Will Be Done

(Uttarakanda, after doha 78, chau 1–2)

Avidya (ignorance) can never take possession of the Lord's servant;

Impelled by the Lord, vidya (knowledge) takes the place of avidya.

The servant is never destroyed by ignorance and doubt;

Along with knowledge, his devotion continues to develop. 165

SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM

5. Let Thy Will Be Done

(7:5:23–24) Hearing, singing, remembering,

Service to His feet, worship, salutations,

Servant-like behaviour, friendliness

And surrender to Vishnu are the nine steps to bhakti. 155

YOGA SUTRAS OF SAGE PATANJALI

4. Contentment – Living the Peace of the Soul

(2:42) Unexcelled happiness comes from the practice of contentment. 143

Glossary

Abhedha bhakti – union between the devotee and the object of devotion; bhakti of total union

Abhisheka – ceremonial bath, consecration

Acharyas – spiritual preceptor, master

Adharma – disharmony; not fulfilling one's natural role in life; unrighteousness

Aghora – one for whom nothing is abominable; one who has mastered the elements; totally innocent

Ananda – pure bliss; natural state of consciousness

Antar mouna – inner silence; meditative technique belonging to the fifth step of raja yoga (pratyahara)

Antaryamin – inner ruler; the Supreme Being present in every object of creation and guiding all creatures

Arati – worship involving waving of lights with reverence before a deity

Archana – worship

Asmita – notion of 'I' or 'I-ness'; awareness of 'I am' superimposed on the body, action and mind; the feeling of 'I' identified with an action; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*

Asura – demon, evil spirit; the enemies of righteousness and the divine

Atma, atman – the self beyond mind and body; principle of life, highest reality, Supreme Consciousness, spirit, soul

Atmabhava – feeling of unity with all; seeing the atman (soul) equally in all beings

Atmanivedan, atmanivedanam – complete self-surrender

Atmasamarpan – self-surrender

Aum – the universal cosmic mantra representing the four states of consciousness; the sound indicating the Supreme Reality or Brahman; conveys concepts of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence

Avatara – descent or incarnation of God to the mortal plane

Ayodhyakanda – second section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*

Bhagavad Gita – literally, ‘divine song’; Sri Krishna’s discourse to his disciple Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the commencement of the great Mahabharata war; one of the source books of Indian philosophy, containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga

Bhajan – devotional song

Bhakta – devotee

Bhakti – intense inner devotion in which the intellect, emotions and self are channelled towards a relationship with the divine; highest love

Bhakti marga – path of worship, ritual and adoration leading to the experience of bhakti

Bhakti yoga – branch of yoga in which emotional energy is channelled towards a divine relationship; a systematic path with nine stages which expand, strengthen and purify the emotions

Bhava, bhavana – feeling; condition; attitude; inclination or disposition of mind

Bhava samadhi – samadhi attained through intense emotion

Bheda bhakti – the worshipper and the object of worship maintain separate identity; bhakti of duality; bhakti yoga described by Sage Vasishtha to Sri Rama

Bhiksha – begging, soliciting

Brahmamuhurta – the two hours around sunrise (in India between 4 am and 6 am) best suited to yoga sadhana

Brahmastra – a missile, presided over by Brahman

Brahmin – the priestly caste; one whose consciousness is immersed in Brahman

Dama – control of the outer senses; self-command through self-restraint and curbing the passions

Darshan – a glimpse; vision; direct perception; philosophy

Dasya – servant

Dharma – the natural role one plays in life; ethical law; duty; the laws or fundamental support of life; righteousness

Drashta – witness, uninvolved observer, onlooker, seer; the consciousness which knows what is going on; the inner self

Grihastha ashrama – the second stage of life according to the ancient vedic ashrama tradition, i.e. household or married life from 25 to 50 years of age

Guna – quality; the three gunas, qualities or aspects of prakriti (nature) are sattwa, rajas and tamas

Gurukul – educational system of ancient India, where children lived in an ashram or family of the guru and were taught a comprehensive syllabus for life

Indriyas – sense organ; power of the senses

Ishavasya Upanishad – the last chapter of the *Yajur Veda* which speaks of the supreme knowledge; also known as the Vedanta Upanishad as it contains the essence of vedantic philosophy

Ishta deva, ishta devata – one's personal chosen deity and form of worship

Ishwara pranidhana – cultivation of faith in the supreme or indestructible reality; surrender to God; complete dedication of one's actions and will to the Lord

Japa – a meditation practice involving repetition of a mantra

Jiva – principle of life; individual or personal soul; living being

Jivanmukta – liberated in life; an enlightened person, a person purified by true knowledge of the Supreme Reality and freed from future births while still embodied

Jnana – knowledge, cognition, wisdom; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience

Jnani – one who expresses wisdom in daily life

- Karma** – action and result; law of cause and effect
- Kathopanishad** – one of the principal Upanishads
- Kirtan, kirtanam** – singing of God’s name; practice in which a group of people sing a collection of mantras
- Kishkindhakanda** – fourth section (kanda) of *Ramacharita-manas*
- Lila** – literally, ‘play’; activity of prakriti and its three gunas
- Mahabharata** – epic of ancient India said to be composed by Sage Vedavyasa, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the Kaurava and Pandava princes. It consists of eighteen sections and the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of it
- Mahapurusha** – great man; sage; person who has realized the totality of consciousness
- Mahatma** – literally, ‘great soul’; used with reference to a person who has destroyed the ego and realized the self as one with all
- Mandala** – visual image, form or symbol which one may visualize or concentrate on, externally or internally; circular symbolic pictorial depiction of cosmic power and/or the human psyche
- Mantra** – words of power; sound vibrations which liberate the mind when repeated
- Mimamsa** – deep reflection, analysis; school of Indian philosophy
- Moksha** – liberation from the cycles of birth and death and the illusion of maya
- Mouna** – silence; measured speech
- Muni** – one who contemplates; one who has conquered the mind; one who maintains silence or stillness of mind
- Nada** – sound; subtle sound or vibration created by the union of the Shiva and Shakti tattwas; the first manifestation of the unmanifest Absolute
- Narada Bhakti Sutras** – one of the main bhakti yoga texts, authored by Sage Narada
- Nirguna** – without quality or attribute; formless

Nirvana – cessation of suffering, final liberation or emancipation in Buddhist thought; higher state of existence or awareness

Nirvikalpa samadhi – state in which the mind ceases to function and only pure consciousness remains; superconscious state where mental modifications cease to exist, resulting in transcendence of the manifest world

Om – See Aum

Padaseva, padasevanam – showing respect; service of the guru; adherence to the guru's teaching

Para bhakti – supreme devotion, bhakti. It is said to accompany or follow the highest knowledge and be a state of consciousness which is self-contained

Paramatma – cosmic Soul or Consciousness; Supreme Self; the atma of the entire universe; God

Paropakara – social karma, working for the benefit of others in society

Pooja – worship

Poornata – fullness

Prakriti – individual nature; nature; manifest and unmanifest nature composed of the three gunas; the active principle of manifest energy

Pranava – another word for the sacred syllable *Aum* or *Om*, the primal sound vibration, the symbol of the Soul or Self

Prasad – favour, grace; blessed gift or object, something full of grace

Pratipaksha bhavana – taking the opposite attitude; a means to balance the mind

Prem – love, affection; tenderness; regard

Puranas – eighteen ancient texts containing the earliest mythology of the tantric and vedic traditions

Purushartha – human attainment; self-effort; the four basic needs or desires to be fulfilled in life, viz artha (wealth), kama (desire), dharma (duty), moksha (liberation)

Raga – passion; affection; attachment; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as attraction or attachment to what gives pleasure

Rajarishi – royal sage; philosopher king; a rishi who is a kshatriya

Ramacharitamanas – a version of the *Ramayana* written by Tulsidas. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India

Ramayana – one of the most famous ancient Indian epics, relating the life of Sri Rama, the most widely known version was composed by Valmiki, containing about 24,000 verses in sections

Rishi – seer; realized sage; one who contemplates or meditates on the Self

Sadachara – correct, appropriate conduct

Sadhana – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly

Sadhu – good or holy person, sage, saint

Sadvichara – correct, appropriate thinking

Saguna – with qualities (gunas)

Sakama – desire-oriented attitude, motivated by self-interest

Sakhya, sakhya bhava – attitude or way of relating to God as a friend; relationship between Arjuna and Sri Krishna

Sama – renunciation of actions; equanimity

Samadhi – the culmination of meditation, state of oneness of the mind with the object of concentration and the universal consciousness; self-realization

Samadrishti – equal vision

Samarpan – surrender

Samata – equipoise; balance in life

Sampradaya – tradition, lineage

Samsara – illusory world; the course or circuit of worldly life; unending cycle of birth and death

Samskara – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; the impressions which condition one's nature, causing one to react or respond in a certain way

Sankalpa – positive resolve; purpose, aim, intention; willpower

Sankirtan – see Kirtan

Sannyasa – dedication; complete renunciation of the world, its possessions and attachments; abandonment of the phenomenal world

- Santosha, samtushta** – complete contentment, complete absence of any desire
- Satsang, satsanga** – gathering in which the ideals and principles of truth are discussed; spiritual association; association with the wise and the good
- Seva** – literally, ‘being That’; service; selfless service; to become one with the divine transcendental nature, and to express that nature in thought, word and deed
- Shaiva** – relating to the God Shiva; one who worships Shiva as the Supreme Reality
- Shakti** – primal energy; manifest consciousness; power, ability, capacity, strength, energy; counterpart of Shiva; the moving power of nature and consciousness; in Indian mythology Shakti is often symbolized as a divine woman
- Sharanagati** – self-surrender
- Shastra** – an authoritative treatise on any subject, particularly science and religion; sacred book
- Shivalinga, shivalingam** – black oval-shaped stone; symbol of Shiva; symbol of consciousness
- Shraddha** – trust, faith, belief; religious faith; composure of mind
- Siddha** – an adept or perfected person; one who has developed his/her psychic and pranic capacity to the point of mastery
- Siddhi** – perfection; enhanced pranic and psychic capacity; paranormal or supernormal accomplishment; control of mind and prana; eight supernatural powers obtained by yogis as a result of long practice
- Sloka** – verse
- Smaran, smaranam** – remembrance, recollection; one of the nine paths of bhakti yoga
- Srimad Bhagavata, Bhagavatam** – one of the eighteen major Puranas dealing with the avatars of Vishnu, it speaks in great detail about the life of Sri Krishna; see Purana
- Sundarkanda** – fifth section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*
- Swadharma** – one’s own duty in life; the most appropriate actions for each person to perform in accordance with his inner nature

Swaroop – one’s own form or shape; natural state or condition; essential nature; true constitution

Tapasvi – ascetic, one who practises austerity, tapas

Treta Yuga – second of the four aeons of the world; the yuga in which Sri Rama lived

Upanishads – the philosophical portion of the Vedas, traditionally 108 in number; containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of the Absolute and the path leading towards it; literally, ‘to sit near and listen’ (to the spiritual teacher)

Upasana – personalized form of worship

Uttarakanda – seventh section (kanda) of *Ramacharitamanas*

Vairagya – non-attachment; absence of sensual craving and desires; detachment; supreme dispassion

Vaishnava – the sect that reveres incarnations of Vishnu as the Supreme Reality

Vandana, vandanam – adoration, salutation; one of the means to attain the state of bhakti

Vasana – subtle impressions which are the seeds of desires

Vedanta – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy; literally, ‘the last part of the Vedas’; the school of thought based primarily on the Upanishads; the doctrine of non-dualism (Advaita)

Vedas – ancient texts revealed to the sages and saints of India, explaining and regulating every aspect of life from the Supreme Reality to worldly affairs; four in number: *Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva*, which are further divided into the Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishads; the oldest books in the library of humankind, parts of them revealed to sages and seers before 5,000 BCE

Veera bhakti – emotion of enmity; relationship Ravana had towards Sri Rama

Vichara – reflection; enquiry into the nature of the self, Brahman or truth

Vidya – knowledge or science, particularly knowledge of spiritual truth and non-mundane reality

Vishwas – trust

Viveka – discrimination; right knowledge or understanding

Vritti – a modification arising in the mind related to a thought pattern; a particular mental state or condition

Yajna – sacrifice; yajna has three components: ritual or worship, satsang and unconditional giving

Yantra – a geometric symbol of cosmic power designed to unleash the hidden potential energy within consciousness; used in meditation and concentration practices

Yoga Sutras – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali

Yoga Vasishtha – a monumental scripture on Vedanta in the form of a dialogue between Sri Rama and his guru Sage Vasishtha

Glossary of Names and Places

Agastya, Rishi – sage known for his knowledge and siddhis

Agnideva – the God of fire

Ahalya – wife of Sage Gautama, redeemed from a curse by Sri Rama's grace

Arjuna – name of the third Pandava brother; son of Indra and Kunti; in the *Bhagavad Gita* he received divine revelation from Sri Krishna

Ayodhya – birthplace of Sri Rama

Badrinath – temple at Badri in the Himalayas; one of the four seats established by Adi Shankaracharya

Benares – see Varanasi

Bharat – brother of Sri Rama; son of King Dasharatha and Kaikeyi

Brahma, Brahman – etymologically, 'ever-expanding, limitless consciousness'; name of Supreme Consciousness or cosmic intelligence according to Vedanta philosophy; God as creator; monistic concept of Absolute Reality

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Gouranga – (1485–1534) reformer of the Vaishnava faith; one of the contributors of the bhakti movement in India during the Mughal era

Chitrakoot – place of exile of Sri Rama where Tulsidas had darshan of Sri Rama and Lakshman

Damodar – another name of Sri Krishna

Dandaka – forest in central India, mentioned in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*

- Dasharatha** – king of Ayodhya; father of Sri Rama
- Dhritarashtra** – blind king; father of the Kauravas in the *Mahabharata*
- Dhruva** – bhakta famous for his steadfast worship of Narayana; the pole star is named after him
- Draupadi** – great devotee of Sri Krishna, daughter of King Drupada of Panchala and wife of the five Pandava brothers, in the *Mahabharata* epic
- Duhshasana** – younger brother of Duryodhana
- Duryodhana** – eldest son of King Dhritarashtra and Gandhari; leader of the Kaurava clan.
- Dwarakanath** – another name of Sri Krishna
- Ek Nath** – (1533–1606) Indian saint of Maharashtra; famous for his inspiring *Ek Nathi Bhagvatha*
- Gandhi, Mahatma** – (1869–1948) Indian national leader who established his country's freedom through a non-violent revolution
- Ganesha** – elephant-headed Hindu deity; remover of obstacles; son of Shiva and Parvati
- Ganga** – river Ganges, most sacred river in India
- Gopis** – companions of the young Krishna in Vrindavan
- Gorakhnath, Yogi** – founder of the Nath sect; author of *Gorakhsha Samhita*
- Govinda** – another name of Sri Krishna
- Guru Nanak** – (1469–1538) founder of Sikhism
- Hanuman** – name of a powerful monkey chief possessing extraordinary strength and powers which he manifested on several critical occasions on behalf of Sri Rama, the Lord of his heart.
- Hari** – name of Vishnu, the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the preservation of the universe; Supreme Consciousness
- Indra** – king of the vedic gods, the ruler of heaven; lord of the senses; the mind or the soul; the rain god
- Jagannath** – another name for Sri Krishna
- Janaki** – another name of Sita; daughter of King Janaka

Jatayu – eagle with divine gifts; friend to King Dasharatha and Sri Rama

Jnandeva, Jnaneshwar – (1275–1296) Indian saint; author of the classical texts *Jnaneshwari* and *Bharati Deepika*

Kabir, Kabirdas – (1440–1518) poet and mystic, his teachings blend Hinduism, Sufism and bhakti

Kaikeyi – one of the three wives of King Dasharatha; mother of Bharat

Kali – primal manifestation of Shakti; destroyer of time, space, object and ignorance

Kamsa – king of Mathura; maternal uncle of Sri Krishna

Kashi – see Varanasi

Kauravas – the thousand descendants of Kuru who, headed by Duryodhana, fought the fratricidal Mahabharata war against their cousins, the Pandavas, as recorded in the *Mahabharata*

Kishkindha – kingdom and capital of King Sugriva, king of monkeys; name given to fourth section of *Ramacharitamamas*.

Krishna, Sri – the ‘black’ or ‘dark one’; eighth incarnation of Vishnu; avatara who descended in the Dwapara Yuga. Sri Krishna is perhaps the most celebrated hero in Hindu mythology and seems to be an historical figure. To uphold dharma he orchestrated the Mahabharata war. His teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during that war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*

Kumbhakarna – brother of Ravana; slain by Sri Rama

Kunti – mother of the five Pandavas, wife of Pandu in the *Mahabharata* epic

Lakshman – hero of the epic *Ramayana*; brother of Sri Rama, son of Dasharatha and his wife Sumitra

Lakshmi, Mahalakshmi – goddess of fortune, prosperity and beauty, the consort of Vishnu

Lanka – island residence of Ravana, present-day Sri Lanka

Madhava – another name of Sri Krishna

Mathura – name of an ancient town which is the birthplace of Sri Krishna, situated on the right bank of the river Yamuna

Milarepa – (11th century) Tibetan saint

- Mirabai** – (1547–1614) princess; Indian poet saint; devotee of Sri Krishna
- Narada, Sage** – author of *Narada Bhakti Sutras*; devotee of Vishnu
- Narayana** – another name of Vishnu
- Pandavas** – sons of Pandu: Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Sahadev and Nakula; the five brothers who held an inter-family feud against the Kauravas as recorded in the *Mahabharata*
- Parvati** – goddess and consort of Shiva, mother of Ganesha and Kartikeya
- Patanjali, Sage** – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; rishi who codified the system of raja yoga
- Prahlada** – son of demon Hiranyakashipu; great devotee of Vishnu. His faith helped him withstand many trials; Vishnu saved him in the form of Narasimha, half man and half lion
- Radha** – beloved gopi of Sri Krishna
- Raghunatha** – another name of Sri Rama
- Rama, Sri** – the seventh avatara of Vishnu and embodiment of dharma, hero of the epic *Ramayana*; a heroic and virtuous king
- Ramakrishna, Paramahansa** – (1836–1886) Indian saint and mystic who perfected sadhanas from all religions; guru of Swami Vivekananda
- Ramdas, Samartha Ramdas** – (1608–1682) Indian saint, poet and social reformer
- Ravana** – ten-headed demon king who kidnapped Sita; he was slain by Sri Rama; his ten heads symbolize attachment to the phenomenal reality
- Sarada Devi** – wife of Ramakrishna Paramahansa
- Saraswati** – goddess of knowledge, speech and learning, daughter of Brahma
- Shabari** – tribal woman and devotee of Sri Rama; she waited 60 years for darshan of Sri Rama; symbol of unflinching faith
- Shatrughna** – son of King Dasharatha and his wife Sumitra; younger brother of Sri Rama, and twin brother of Lakshman
- Shiva** – state of pure consciousness, individual and cosmic, original source of yoga; Lord of yogis; auspicious, benevolent one; name of the god of the Hindu trinity who is

- entrusted with the work of destruction; destroyer of the ego and duality
- Sita** – daughter of King Janaka and the wife of Sri Rama, as recorded in the epic *Ramayana*
- Sugriva** – a monkey chief who assisted Sri Rama in his search and recovery of Sita
- Totapuri, Swami** – (19th century) guru of Ramakrishna Paramahansa
- Tulsidas** – (1532–1623) author of one of the versions of the famous epic *Ramayana* called the *Ramacharitamanas*, which describes the life of Sri Rama. It is composed in poetic form and is chanted by devotees throughout India
- Uddhava** – devotee of Sri Krishna; a childhood friend of Sri Krishna who later learned bhakti from the gopis
- Vali** – monkey chief, who at the behest of his younger brother Sugriva, was slain by Sri Rama
- Varanasi** – holy city connected especially with Shiva; also known as Benares and Kashi
- Vasishtha, Sage** – a celebrated rishi and seer of the Vedas; guru of Sri Rama; author of many vedic hymns his teachings are recorded in *Yoga Vasishtha*, one of the greatest expositions of jnana yoga
- Vasudeva** – father of Sri Krishna
- Vedavyasa, Vyasa** – compiler of the four Vedas in their present form
- Vibhishana** – youngest brother of demon Ravana; devotee of Sri Rama
- Vishnu** – vedic deity; the second deity of the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva), entrusted with the preservation of the universe, a duty which obliges him to appear in several incarnations; Supreme Consciousness
- Vishwamitra, Sage** – literally, ‘friend of the universe’; a celebrated sage during the time of the Sri Rama
- Vivekananda, Swami** – (1863–1903) disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa; he brought his guru’s teachings to the West
- Yama** – name of the Lord of Death
- Yashoda** – wife of Nanda and foster mother of Sri Krishna

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